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## Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews - Part II

### SHORT DESCRIPTION

In its second part, this module explicates the action scheme of autobiographical narrative interviewing, and it informs about the most general research steps of doing qualitative social research on the empirical base of narrative interviewing: text sort analysis, structural description, analytical abstraction, contrastive comparison, and developing theoretical models. All these steps of research, especially the first three for the realization of a single case analysis, are explicated and demonstrated on the empirical base of one autobiographical interview. The single case analysis of this interview especially addresses the intriguing phenomenon of biographical work.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To make the reader capable to conduct autobiographical narrative interviews.
2. To enable the reader to pursue the arc of work of scientific and / or professional biography analysis.
3. To let the reader understand the special epistemic importance of structural description and how it can be documented.
4. To let the reader understand how the arc of research work leads to analytical outcomes, which are building blocks for the construction of theoretical models. (The specific theoretical building block that comes out of our single case analysis and out of its incipient comparison with other cases is biographical work.)

### CONTENT

1. **Extempore autobiographical story telling in the setting of the autobiographical narrative interview**
2. **Research steps for single case analysis: text sort differentiation, structural description, analytical abstraction**
3. **The analysis of the textual microstructures of narrative units as the analytical core of structural description**
4. **Single Case Analysis of the Funke Interview**
5. **A short note on the further research steps: contrastive comparison and developing a theoretical model**
6. **Exercises**
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## **1 Extempore autobiographical story telling in the setting of the autobiographical narrative interview**

In the first part of the module – and also in the introductory module - we recognized that extempore autobiographical story telling could be very useful in counselling processes of vocational rehabilitation. During the last thirty years qualitative social research in sociology and educational science developed the special format of the autobiographical narrative interview. This interview format is sensible, if the researcher focuses on biographical processes of special relevancy for the study of interesting social worlds (e.g., professional social worlds as those of social work or psychological counselling), on problems of the life course (as to what would be the impact of a severe chronic illness on the life course of an afflicted person) and/or on social problems (e.g., being long-term unemployed because of a severe chronic illness, being in a process of occupational self-alienation and of losing one's work position, etc.), or on collective social processes in which biographical experiences and dynamics of identity development or impediments are prominent (e.g., social movements). The basic reason for the enactment of the autobiographical narrative interview is the assumption that social reality is not just experienced and bestowed with meaning by individual actors with their unique life histories, but in addition that it is produced, is supported and kept in force, is endured with pain and suffered, is protested at and turned over or even destroyed as well as it is gradually changed by individual actors with their personal life histories and involved biographical identity developments. There is the additional assumption that social reality more basically consists of social processes and less importantly of stable social structures since they are products of social processes and changing permanently. The two basic assumptions hold true for the production and changes of small segments of social reality, as in the development of a family or breaking away from it, in the course of a friendship relationship or the unfolding or deterioration of a work team, but this also holds true for the change of larger social contexts like the state of a national society (e.g. by a war conflict), the unfolding of a social and/or cultural movement, the establishment or reconstruction of a professional social world and its discourse arena, etc. There is a very close relationship between the unfolding of individual and collective identities; their "histories" and identity work are very much linked to each other. Thus, taking individual life histories and analysing them is a promising avenue to social reality.

### **1.1 Conditions for autobiographical narrative interviewing; scientific vs. professional interviewers**

But one has to take into account that letting somebody tell her or his life history is not a commonly known and public accepted type of interviewing. Instead it reveals very private aspects of the prospective informant, and therefore its enactment does not fit the routine proceedings of institutional, organizational or media localities and their logic of time. Therefore an autobiographical narrative interview should be done at the home place or in the protected inner office of the informant or the interviewer, if she or he is identical with the professional counsellor, or at least at an anonymous and, at the same time, somewhat protected park bench or place in a restaurant. And, in addition, the informant should have the feeling that it is *just her or his* time of minimally one and a half hours up to three or even more hours (and not the time of the work organization or public institution, where the informant is trained, counselled, treated or working in) that she or he is using up, e.g. preferably a time span in the late afternoon or evening after the work day or at the week end. Otherwise she or he would not find the inner tranquillity to embark on such a *recherche du temps perdu* (Marcel Proust), since such an extempore autobiographical narration of personal

experiences is not only time consuming, but in addition personally engrossing, emotionally moving and intellectually challenging.

One must also take into account that the usual ways connected to standard types of interviewing as to how and where to get informants are not an option. Prospective informants of autobiographical narrative interviews cannot be picked from the files of the local residents' registration office by a random generator. One reason for this is, that the number of informants in a study through autobiographical narrative interviews must be extremely reduced compared with the number of informants in statistically representative random surveys, since the material produced in such an interview, the autobiographical narrative rendering, is so complex and must be studied as a uniquely shaped single case taking into account both form and content of the autobiographical narrative and the evolvment of personal identity expressed by it. Another reason for the non-viability of a random selection of interviewees is that prospective informants must be selected and contracted by criteria of certain biographical (and therefore quite personal or even quite unique) features one cannot make out in official social-statistical data files and the random type selection from it. The approached prospective informant must have the understanding that she or he was individually picked because she or he has to offer very specific biographical (experiential) data, which acknowledge and underline her or his personal uniqueness. Otherwise the establishment of the autobiographical trust relationship between the two partners of the interview as the essential condition for autobiographical narration would not be possible. Involved in this is the mutual sharing of the two interaction postulates (a) of the analytical relevance of the informant's life history in its personal uniqueness for the ongoing research as well as (b) of the trustworthiness of the interviewer in respecting this personal uniqueness by its careful consideration as the empirical ground for new creative generalizations for professional or scientific theorizing and by protecting the strict anonymity of the informant at the same time. Therefore, the interviewer must plausibly explain to the prospective informant how she or he accomplished this special pick by talking to knowledgeable persons, who would know about the specific and very personal qualification of the prospective informant for the planned autobiographical narrative. These intermediate, contact-establishing persons, who as first instances would be factually approached in order to get contacts to persons topically relevant for the research could be friends or acquaintances of the prospective informant, and sometimes they could even be former participants, i.e. interviewees, of the ongoing study themselves; this would then be a felicitous outcome of the ethnographic snowball system of knowledgeable persons who freely and competently refer to additional knowledgeable persons.

Contrary to this first snowball way of recruiting the interviewees, the selection of prospective informants could also be - even much faster and more effectively - accomplished through the support of a work, service or counselling institution that specifically deals with a clear-cut circle of persons, which is defined by characteristic features of suffering or competencies and which is therefore also of special interest for the ongoing qualitative research. In a study on biographical counselling in vocational rehabilitation situations such a research-supporting contact institution could be a service organisation for the professional counselling of rehabilitation clients. Together with the researcher one of the counsellors would sift through the file of clients of vocational rehabilitation in her or his service organization and select clients with topically interesting features (e.g., clients with a strong interest in vocational rehabilitation vs. clients who have lost the courage to believe in their return to the world of occupational work). But one has to take into account that the clients selected for the conduct of an autobiographical narrative interview could feel hierarchically processed and controlled by the counselling organization, which quite often also is the provider, the door opener, the distributor, the mediator or assigner of the material and educational resources that the clients would like to

receive. Therefore it could happen, albeit the researcher has sincerely assured not to forward any information from the interview, let alone the whole interview, to the counselling institution, that the client as prospective informant would not feel free to embark on an extempore narration and recollection of her or his own authentic autobiographical experiences, since she or he would be afraid that some of the contents of such a free autobiographical rendering would be against the preferences of the counselling institution. The approached client could then fear to be excluded from the benefits of the service organization, in case the latter would gain knowledge about those disliked contents of the client's autobiographical rendering.

It would be almost impossible to successfully fight such a mistrust of prospective clients, in case it would have actually been elicited, even if the researcher thoroughly assured strict anonymity and identity protection of the informant. If and when mistrust becomes dominant in the awareness of the prospective informant, the researcher wouldn't be able to get open autobiographical narrative renderings proper from her or him. Then the researcher should take recourse to the slower snowball system of personal references and avenues to possible informants starting with questioning friends and acquaintances, whether they would know persons with social and personal features topically relevant in the planned or ongoing research project. Of course a professional counsellor undertaking such a study of biographical processes would receive the necessary system of first references to possible interview partners almost automatically from her or his colleagues in one's own or in – preferably – similar institutions. (Of course, on the other hand, the latter could turn out to be practically difficult, since the colleagues could be concerned about critical views of their clients.) - In case the counsellor doesn't plan a broader research, but would just like to deepen the counselling process of her or his singular client through an analysis of her or his individual life history on the empirical base of an autobiographical narrative interview, she or he would just invite this client to participate in a narrative interview, and would assure her or him that any problematic personal information from the interview would not be given away (and, of course, the interview not forwarded as a whole) to other professionals, especially those involved in the case management, to the hierarchical control unit of the institution or to other organizations, especially those involved in the case management.

The following sketch how to conduct an autobiographical narrative interview is mainly focused on scientific researchers, who utilize the data collecting method of autobiographical narrative interviewing, since it was developed and practiced in the context of qualitative social research in sociology and educational science during the last thirty years. But the following short description of the action scheme and the communicative format of autobiographical narrative interviewing as it is used by social scientists holds also true for its utilization by professional counsellors. Of course there are some differences in the social arrangement of the action scheme of interviewing, whether it is enacted by a qualitative researcher or whether by a professional counsellor.

Some of the problems of establishing and keeping the social arrangement of autobiographical narrative interviewing are more moderate for the professional than for the scientist. A professional counsellor doesn't have the search problem how to find and get in contact with informants, since she or he can approach them amongst her or his clients or amongst those of professional colleagues. A professional counsellor doesn't have to work under the risk not to be able to provide counselling or even psychotherapeutic help if she or he trespasses the narrow confines of the rules of restraint and modesty of a one-shot narrative interviewing session, e.g. not to criticise the informant, not to admonish her or him, not to argue or even quarrel with her or him as well as not to break her or his personal defence system, since a professional counsellor has established a longer-lasting professional work contract with the client and possibly even a therapeutic relationship, on the social base

of which she or he would have the chance to repair mistakes of such a trespassing in the following sessions.

On the other hand, a professional counsellor is also confronted with additional problems of autobiographical interviewing, and some of the tasks of establishing and keeping the social arrangement of the interview are even more difficult to handle for her or him than for a scientific researcher. She or he has to fight the risk to oblige the client by moral constraint - or even to force the client by means of institutional procedure- to accept the task of autobiographical story telling. (It seems so easy to utilize one's power position in such a professional and/or institutional procedure.) In addition, there is always the danger to mix certain rules of counselling and communicative psychotherapy with the very different rules of autobiographical narrative interviewing, especially those of communicative restraint for the interviewer just to elicit the informant's own topical line of self-evolving rendering, especially of autobiographical narration, and otherwise to keep one's mouth shut. E.g., the typical psychotherapeutic strategy of conversational mirroring, i.e. of permanent descriptive repetition and reformulation of the emotional states that the client reveals during the course of her or his problem presentation, would hinder the dynamic unfolding of the scheme of extempore narration and would distort the spirit of getting personally engrossed in narrative recollection. To avoid such a mixing might be quite difficult for a professional counsellor, since she or he developed a professional routine habit to use classical psychotherapeutic conversation strategies (which, of course, can be very productive in true counselling or psychotherapeutic sessions). Finally the professional counsellor is much more prone to break the rule of strict confidence and to share her or his knowledge extracted from a narrative interview with colleagues in one's own and in other social assistance institutions, since she or he works together with them on a daily base and the others might know about the enactment of an autobiographical narrative interview with a certain client and would ask targeted person-specific questions. The sharing of problematic personal information from an autobiographical narrative interview understood as confidential by the client/interviewee would be a severe ethical fault, since the narrative interviewer is ethically bound not to give away any person-specific biographical information gained in a narrative interview, which the informant would like to confine to the trust relationship with her or his professional counsellor. (Of course, on the other hand, a professional counsellor could - and should - always share with her or his colleagues *general* insights into biographically crystallized and sedimentary problems of her or his group of clients.)

For both types of interviewers, for the professional counsellor and for the scientific researcher, I will now start to shortly describe the communicative format of the autobiographical narrative interview. But it might now be understandable, that the following sketch will be *explicitly* addressed just to the case of the scientific researcher and not to the case of the professional counsellor. I would like to focus just on the rules and procedures of the autobiographical narrative interview, and I do not want to mix them with rules and procedures of professional counselling or psychotherapy. In case I would explicitly address the interview work of professional counsellors and psychotherapist, too, I would be forced permanently to differentiate between the two sets of rules and procedures, and this would be time-consuming. Professional readers will be able to help themselves to contextualize the rules and procedures of narrative interviewing within the cosmos of professional rules, procedures and practices. The rules and procedures of the autobiographical narrative interview are features of a scientific mode of data collection although they can be utilized in professional counselling practice, too. Nobody should transgress the confines of restraint (to just let the informant tell, describe, argue without interference) as well as of confidence (to keep the anonymity of the informant and to respect her or his personal uniqueness) that are essential for the social arrangement and the

action scheme of the narrative interview. The professional counsellor is ethically bound to these confines, too.

## **1.2 Contact and negotiation phase, explaining the modus operandi to the informant**

Normally, at least in the case of the *scientific* narrative interview, the contact and negotiation work for the autobiographical narrative interview will be split into two engagements: a first communicative contact by letter and/or phone or by a short introductory visit as well as a second negotiation phase at the very beginning of the interview session itself. For the sake of brevity, I will lump these two engagements together in the following sketch; the split of contact and negotiation activities according to these two engagements and contact situations should be flexibly decided on and circumspectly performed according to the specific nature of the case and situation. But one should take into consideration that the first interactive engagement should just have the function to open up the contact, give a first idea of the task of autobiographical story telling and set a first step for establishing a mutual trust relationship. It should be quite short and protected against the possible tendency of a prospective interviewer to communicatively blurt out and to start immediately to tell her or his life history, when and where there is no proper time and space for it, or to give an elaborate introductory rehearsal of it. Such a premature and partial autobiographical rendering before the main interview session would irritate and distort the autobiographical rendering of the informant within the main interview session. – The action scheme and the communicative format of the autobiographical narrative interview now are as follows:

The researcher tells the prospective informant about her or his research project without scientific terminology and theoretical hypotheses; it should be just the personal story how the researcher developed the idea to get in contact with the interview partner; this is the personal story that the researcher can reciprocally contribute to the communicative situation of the interview. The researcher explains that, from her or his perspective, the life historical experiences of the prospective informant seem to be pivotal for her or his research project. The informant should not assume – the researcher assures - that her or his life history would not be important at all. To the contrary, each autobiographical narrative in its authenticity, in the sense and so far as the respective informant would have been personally entangled within social processes topical to the research and the respective unfolding of life historical problems connected with them, would be of central importance for the research process. Social science generalizations would only be sound on the basis of detailed empirical primary material, as an autobiographical narrative interview would perfectly generate it. If the informant would ask her- or himself, whether the narrative process of presentation should be more or less detailed, the researcher would always prefer the more detailed alternative, since more details would mean sounder generalizations, which are better empirically grounded. The researcher – so she or he explains - would be interested exactly in the *unique* life history of the informant with all its specific personal features and their combination. But at the same time she or he, the researcher, would mask everything in the narrative rendering that could possibly lead to individually identify the prospective informant.

In most cases of interview negotiation the prospective informant reacts to the proposal of the researcher in a positive manner. This is the beginning of the necessary communicative trust relationship in the interview situation. Now the interviewer starts to explain the modus operandi of the narrative interview to the informant. A central concern in the data collection of the research process would be not to cut the red thread of autobiographical story telling of the informant. Exactly her or his perspective and relevancies would be of interest and not

those of the researcher. Therefore she or he, the researcher, would ask the informant to tell her or his life history from the beginning up to the present. However, what the beginning of her or his life history would be, remains for the informant to decide strictly by her- or himself: it could be her or his birth date, it could be the first personal remembrance, it could be a central episode in the life of the parents or even the grandparents, it could be her or his entering school or the onset of a central problem in childhood that was difficult to control. Then, when he or she, the informant, had gotten started, the interviewer would not want to interrupt the informant with her or his own thematic questions, since this would draw the informant away from her or his *own* perspective and understanding of her or his life history. The interviewer would just attempt to be a good listener. Therefore she or he would restrict her- or himself just to look at the informant and to listen carefully - generally without asking questions or giving commentaries. Instead, she or he would show interest, only nod in order to show her or his understanding and would only ask topical questions, if and when she or he could not be a good listener anymore, and this would mean: if she or he would not be able anymore to follow up the narrative rendering of the informant.

The researcher as interviewer goes on with the explanation of the *modus operandi* of the interview: In order to be a really good listener, she or he, the researcher, would like to tape-record the autobiographical extempore story telling of the informant. In case an interviewer has to instantly write down what an informant would tell, she or he, the interviewer, would be distracted from the listening process, and there would be many pieces of important information one would not get correctly, or these parts would get lost altogether. Even during the period of the actually ongoing interview process the informant could still decide to keep the taped interview and not to leave it with the interviewer, if she or he would develop a feeling of uneasiness with giving away the original voice of the interview. Then, in case of the informant's decision not to give away the recorded cassette to the interviewer, she or he, the interviewer, would afterwards write down from her or his own memory and in her or his perspective the content of the interview. But of course, contrary to this, the interviewer would very much prefer to be allowed to keep the tape, since the perspective of the informant could then be taken into regard much more carefully, the objectivity and density of information would be much higher and the empirical base for generalizations would be much better.

The researcher and interviewer still adds to her or his explanation of the *modus operandi* of the narrative interview: During the listening process he, the interviewer, would jot down just a few notes at especially interesting points of the informant's presentation process – at points, where the interviewer would like to know even a bit more than what the informant so interestingly alluded to, and sometimes a background picture (an additional story, a description of a situation or an explanation) might become important in order to better understand an obviously important situation or a biographical process that the interviewer hinted at. But those points of narrative rendering of the informant that would elicit a desire in the interviewer as listener for additional information would not mean that he or she, the interviewer, would not be able anymore to easily follow up the line of presentation of the informant, i.e. not be able anymore to be a good listener. And therefore the interviewer would not interrupt the informant; instead, she or he, the interviewer, would just take a few notes in order to ask her or him later. The latter would happen, when she or he, the informant, would have finished her or his commencing autobiographical rendering, i.e. her or his main narrative as the first part of the narrative interview. This point of finishing the main story would be called “narrative coda”. Through the very occurrence of the coda both parties would know very easily, when the first narrative rendering, i.e. the main narrative, of the informant would be finished, since such a coda as a communicative demonstration marker would be quite obvious. – The researcher as interviewer closes her or his explanation of the *modus operandi* of the interview: With such an additional questioning

part the interview would last one and half hour up to three hours. If there would not be enough time to carry through the whole interview within one session, one could split the interview into two halves and could go on with the interview's second part a few days later. (It would be easy for her or him, the informant, to remember the first part.)

### **1.3. The phase of the main story**

After the researcher has explained the *modus operandi* of the autobiographical narrative interview to the informant, the latter will start with her or his narrative rendering. In case the informant still is too strictly oriented towards a laconic way of presentation as it is typical of a written "official" curriculum vitae, at a last time without severe communicative difficulties the interviewer can interrupt her or him immediately after she or he has finished the first or second narrative unit (i.e. after two to five minutes) and ask her or him to tell about her or his sisters, brothers and/or family of origin and the childhood memories of play situations. In reaction to such an inserted "repair" request the level of detailing of the autobiographical presentation would normally rise considerably. Only in situations of presentation, in which the interviewer is not able anymore to follow up the line of presentation of the informant and to function as a good listener who understands the sequential logic of the evolving events and social processes (e.g., if she or he doesn't know, who is being talked about and what kind of event constellation or situation it was where the narrator as story carrier was involved in), she or he should be allowed to interrupt the flow of the narrator's presentation and ask for clarification. Any really topical question, which sets a new external theme stemming from the interviewer, is prone to cut the personal story line of the narrator. There are two reasons for this. Firstly many informants would assume that questions from the researcher would be much more important than their own line of topics, especially if general notions and argumentative potentials were involved in the questioning activity of the interviewer. In post-modern knowledge-based society abstract topics, general categorizations and the argumentative raising of problems and explanations would normally have a much stronger communicative power than the communicative scheme of narration. Secondly, the informant might raise the self-critical question: "What did I do wrong in my presentation, if the interviewer interrupted my course of presentation?" Such a self-critical questioning would again activate argumentative reflections. The informant, then, would leave the scheme of narration and would start to argue with self-accusations or, more probably, with self-legitimizing explanations, since she or he would feel the obligation to clear up the communicative mistakes she or he presumably made. (Schütze 1978; Kallmeyer and Schütze 1977)

During the course of ongoing narration the listening interviewer takes short notes in two totally different types of presentational situations, in which the informant would convey signs of additional narrative potential: The first type is the situation of intentionally sending out hints to additional potentials for sub-stories as the following: "In this regard I could tell additional stories, but this would go too far right now." (Quite often the narrator would smile in such a situation of narrative rendering.) The two versions of the second type of expressing an additional narrative potential, the type of implausibility of the present string of narrative rendering, are points of textual vagueness or even textual discrepancies. In the first version of implausible rendering, the one of textual vagueness, it is not clear how an event B (with its inner and outer aspects) would follow after event A (with its inner and/or outer aspects) in terms of intentionality, conditionality, causality, time sequence, compatibility, additional outer conditions, continuity and/or change of identity, etc. In the second version of implausible rendering, the rendering of a life-historical event constellation (with its outer and/or inner aspects of change including change of personal

identity) is so discrepant in itself that it becomes difficult to understand how this event constellation could proceed at all. This is the case when, e. g., the narrator claims that the situation of a new apprenticeship would have been totally easy-going, and at the same time – or immediately after this euphemistic or normalizing assessment and referring to the same situation - he states a serious problem of learning within the apprenticeship, as we could see in the interview with Mr. Funke in the first part of this module. (Schütze 1976)

The main narrative of the interview will be finished through a specific formulaic expression such as the following: “This was it, Mrs. X. I have now arrived at the present. I am happy that I could finally get order into my life. The story of my life might be of interest for you. It is not really remarkable, but hopefully you can make use of it. I hope that this is what you wanted me to do for you.” With regard to the formulaic expressions, such a coda of the autobiographical narrative can be formulated quite differently, but it normally exhibits two functional parts: the first part ends the flux of the time of the reported life-historical story, and the second part focuses the awareness of both partners in the interview on the actually ongoing communicative situation of the interview conversation and its involved sequential order. This sequential order consists of the closing gesture of the presentational offer of the reported life history by the narrator as first pair part and the reactive evaluative acceptance of the listener as second pair part. In addition, quite often some sort of evaluation of the overall autobiographical story and of the present life situation by the narrator as third functional part is involved as well, but this is not necessarily the case. As I said already, for all of these three functions there are some formulaic standard expressions available, but they are normally connected with a very unique and very personal qualification of the narrator. The combination of all these formulaic and person-specific features makes it very easy for the listener (as interviewer) to identify the coda of the main autobiographical story intuitively. - In immediate reaction to the occurrence of the coda of the informant there will be an explicit expression of gratitude and positive evaluation of the interviewer, since the informant has freely given the recollection of her or his life to the researcher as listener and since she or he did the strenuous and time consuming recollection work.

#### **1.4 The narrative questioning part of the interview**

Then the first section of the questioning part of the narrative interview starts. It is very easy for the listener to refer to the intentionally given signs of the additional narrative potential, i.e. to the freely given hints of the narrator for additional sub-stories, which have been jotted down before by the researcher as interviewer during her or his listening process in the course of the main story part of the interview. One has to just tip at these intentionally given hints and express the wish that the informant should exhaust this part of the additional story potential that she or he had before freely alluded to during her or his autobiographical story telling in the first part of the interview. In reaction to each “tipping at” of the interviewer the narrator would normally smile and would feel happily entitled to tell at least one additional sub-story of the additional story potential alluded to before at respective points of the former narrative rendering.

Contrary to this, the points of vagueness and of discrepancies in the course of autobiographical narrative rendering within the main story part of the interview are quite precarious points of reference to request further and more explicit presentation. Points of vagueness and discrepancies quite often hint at difficult biographical experiences of fading-out, of rationalization or of legitimising; they, then, are the result of the personal defence system of the informant and as such very important building blocks or construction bars, although possibly restricting ones, of the informant’s biographical identity and its

unfolding. It would be unethical if the interviewer would attempt to crack such a personal defence system of the informant, since she or he is not a psychotherapist who offers treatment sessions to the informant as a client or patient regarding those personal problems. But what the interviewer is allowed to do is to return to the status quo ante of the vague or discrepant text passage in the main story line, i.e. to the last textual point of clarity expressing event A before the opaque passage B with a formulation like this: “I could imagine very well how event A happened. But then I did not realize how it went further on. Perhaps I did not pay enough attention or I misunderstood something. Could you, please, start again with the telling of event A and could you then go on?” In case the second narrative rendering generates the same points of implausibility regarding the sequential connection of event A and B, the interviewer is not allowed to ask and prod for an answer for a second time. The interviewer must practice this self-inhibition in order to protect the defence system of the informant. In addition, it would be detrimental if the interviewer would explicitly and critically address the vagueness or discrepancy of the sequential connection between events A and B, as a police officer would do it in an interrogation or a magistrate in a courtroom proceeding. In reaction to this the informant would get the immediate feeling that something in his presentation went “sinfully” wrong, and then she or he would start to defend, rationalize, legitimise, argumentatively explain her or his presentation or the depicted event constellation. In any case, the informant would be forcibly driven out of the communicative scheme of narration, be pushed into and entangled within the communicative scheme of argumentation that doesn’t deal with the details of personally experienced events, but just with general predicates and abstract explanatory systems. This might be interesting in terms of research, too, especially for the study of reflective biographical work, but such an argumentative passage as part of an autobiographical presentation is only reliably interpretable if there is already a baseline of detailed narrative rendering. In addition, the basic communicative trust relationship that was eagerly established in the negotiation and commencement phase of the interview situation would be put at risk. And this could be the beginning of the breakdown of the interview situation altogether.

Of course, the narrator can make use of a set of additional narrative questions that were pre-formulated in a flexible question battery. The recourse to such a pre-formulated external question battery would become necessary, if the interviewer would like to be sure to get specific answers to certain pre-established issues of her or his research. As much as possible, and minimally at least tangentially, these “non-immanent” narrative questions should start from narrative text material produced by the informant her- or himself during the main story part of the interview. This is in order to reduce the risk that she or he would feel forced against her or his will or at least uneasily or unhappily prodded to dwell on imposed topics that don’t belong to her or his own course of presentation and biographical sedimentation of personal experiences. And the list of these non-immanent questions should be commenced only when the immanent part of narrative questioning is already finished, in order not to disturb the reconstructive exhaustion of the autonomous narrative presentation potential of the informant and not to irritate her or his feeling of freedom of creation connected with it. Quite often it turns out that the informant already dealt with most or all pre-formulated questions of the external question battery autonomously within the main story part and/or within the immanent narrative questioning section. Such an autonomous narrative rendering of the informant is always preferable to her or his answers to non-immanent questions, since it much more clearly reveals the authentic perspectives and relevancies of the informant and her or his socio-biographical processes. Therefore, in these cases the respective battery questions should not be raised at all. (In addition, the informant could feel that the mutual assumption of the interaction postulate of cooperativeness, which is pivotal for the establishment and keeping of the trust relationship

within the shared action scheme of autobiographical narrative interviewing, is factually renounced by the imposition of superfluous non-immanent questions of the interviewer.)

### **1.5 The descriptive and argumentative questioning phase of the interview**

After the conclusion of the narrative questioning part of the interview with its exhaustion of the additional narrative potential, a descriptive immanent and non-immanent questioning part follows that deals with the explication of all types of social frames, event carriers, their mutual social relationships and their routine activities, which are relevant for the unfolding life history of the informant as revealed in the various narrative parts of the interview, especially in the main story part. E.g., when Mr. Funke was alluding to the elite sports gymnasium where he was accepted to, then for the interviewer as a non-insider it was not clear which would be the daily routines for the students, what would be the relationship between academic teaching and sports training, what would be the assessment processes for athletic achievements, what would be the hierarchy of athletic excellence among the students, who would decide about the career line of the students and what would be the procedures of assessment, etc. It is now decisive to activate the communicative scheme of description. This can be done by asking a more general question regarding the position of sports and athletic training in the life of the informant as schoolboy and adolescent. Formally the task for the informant conveyed by this type of questioning is to explicate a higher predicate, i.e. sports and athletic training, and to show its relationship to another higher predicate, i.e. position in life, which provides a biographical contextualization for it. In addition to the task of explicating higher predicates and their relationships to each other, there are much more concrete folios for describing features and processes of the (social) world: explicating and following up the social positions, personal features and relationships in a social group (a school class, a work team, a network of friends and acquaintances, etc., the presentational task here being that of following up social relationships and networks with their social categorizations as well as the (fitting, discrepant, ironic, identifying, etc.) relations between social positions and social roles on the one hand and personal characteristics on the other. Another more concrete folio of descriptive presentation activities would be the follow up of all types of paths taken, literally: moving through the city in order to accomplish the daily travel back and forth to two different work places, e.g. that of academic learning and that of athletic training as in the case of the Funke interview, or following up a career line in order to explicate the potential of occupational development in a certain work position or describing an urban milieu through the report of a walk through the city. Still another more concrete type of descriptive activity would be the recapitulation of all types of daily or weekly process routines, e.g. the description of a typical work day, a typical weekly team proceeding of the work and play of students in a reform school. Another quite concrete folio for descriptive presentation would be all types of comparisons with categorical contrast sets as, e.g. in the Funke interview the contrast set between the world of manual work and the world of paper and management work. More complicated, but very important, too, are the formats of the characterization of individual and collective identity using the contrasts between the outer appearance and the inner reality or backstage as well as the figure of the circular stabilization and enforcement of a chain of fitting and contrasting features establishing a social figuration. Of course there are further important folios and formats for descriptive activities. I just wanted to convey the idea that it is so much easier for the informant to get encouraged by the offer of a folio or format of descriptive presentation. In the communicative scheme of description (Kallmeyer and Schütze 1997) the folios and formats

are the pendant to the cognitive figures of extempore narration (see part one of this module).

Only at the very end of the proceedings of the autobiographical narrative interview is it sensible to raise - and then they should be raised - argumentative “why” questions: those immanent ones that the narrator has already asked her- or himself and quarrelled with, but did not systematically work through and answer explicitly, on the one hand, and the non-immanent ones of the interviewer, on the other hand. Answers to the argumentative “why” questions have to be produced within the communicative scheme of argumentation (Toulmin 1958; Schütze 1978,1987). This scheme is powered by the presentational dynamics stemming from the systematic constraints of argumentation and by the specific ordering devices of the scheme of argumentation. One constraint of argumentation, e.g., - there are some others we cannot dwell on here for the sake of brevity - would be to take the stance and the perspective of the opponent against one’s own argumentative activities into regard, to compare them with the stance and perspective of oneself, the proponent, and to weigh both of them in terms of truth, trustworthiness as well as the “epistemic power” of exploration, of gaining insight and generating knowledge. From this stems the drive to take into systematic consideration the deeper meanings of the argumentative contributions of the opponent and - at least partially - to react to them even before they are uttered explicitly. In a narrative interview, the opponents as significant others or important “counter actors” (within the former or present course of life-historical events) are, of course, not physically present, but their practical and communicative counter activities with their specific argumentative meaning and function are remembered and imagined within the course of the ongoing interview presentation. In addition, the informant as story carrier and biography incumbent can become an opponent to some lines of consideration and argumentation of oneself as he is taking into regard the me-images of himself, in the sense of Mead (1934) (see the introductory module). By no means should the interviewer in an autobiographical narrative interview act as an argumentative opponent in her or his own right, since she or he should not take the risk to damage the personal defence system of the informant, which could happen through contentious arguments of the interviewer in a communicative arrangement that has intensively and extensively opened up the inner identity development of the informant and in which her or his personal argumentative activities are always part of the deeper layers of reflective biographical work. As I said already, the interviewer cannot act and is not entitled to act as psychotherapist. But she or he can activate the informant’s own inner turf of argumentation as an important part of her or his reflective biographical work, by asking her or him to formulate her or his own argumentative stances more explicitly. They might be already alluded to or even explicitly formulated in the course of her or his narrative and descriptive rendering or just be hinted at as a tacit or hidden potential of personal argumentation. – Of course a professional counsellor or psychotherapist could become an argumentative opponent in her or his own right in later sessions of the counselling or psychotherapeutic process, in which he would question arguments of her or his client stemming from an autobiographical narrative interview that was conducted in a former session of the counselling or treatment process. But then she or he has to take into account that the information that she or he got from the autobiographical interview could be quite sensitive or even risky in terms of endangering the personal defence system of the client. The counsellor or psychotherapist should then know what she or he dares to do and how she or he would be able to support the client in the ensuing crisis situation by means of professional assessment and procedures. But it should be clear that this doesn’t belong to the acceptable procedures of the narrative interview itself.

In addition the interviewer can ask her or his own why questions, but she or he should present them and follow them up just in the consensual mode of argumentation which would not transgress the confinements of the own argumentative space of the informant. –

The ordering devices of the communicative scheme of argumentation are based on the basic communicative activities of argumentation: formulating propositions, giving explanations for the propositions, providing empirical warrants for the explanations, contesting a proposition by a counter proposition, questioning and doubting a proposition without a counter proposition, giving explanations for the counter propositions, giving empirical warrants for the explanations of the counter propositions as well as requesting statements of propositions, explanations and/or empirical warrants. All of these argumentative activities follow their specific procedures as shown by Toulmin (1958), and the informant and the interviewer should follow them up more or less automatically without unduly argumentative or even contentious enforcement. Such a circumspect and detained follow up will explicate the argumentative grid of the reflective biographical work of the informant, which is important to get a full empirical picture of the unfolding and difficulties of biographical process structures, the identity development and the biographical work of the informant.

The descriptive and the argumentative questions should be asked in the very sequential order dealt with above. More abstract questions using, or searching for, abstract and general higher predicates should be asked later, since they turn the informant away from the more concrete tasks of detailed rendering, and quite often it is impossible to return from more abstract passages of rendering to more concrete ones. That means that the interviewer's provisions for abstract descriptions should preferably be done just after the potential for concrete descriptive activities is exhausted already. (But note that in a more concrete context of rendering an abstract or general questioning of the interviewer this could be the adequate means for eliciting a string of concrete description - giving the informant full leeway to turn to any topic that might be relevant for her or him.) - In addition, the mixing of the elementary schemes of communication, i.e. of the schemes of narration, description and argumentation, in the same context and/or on the same level of presentation should be avoided in order to hinder the chaotic and irritating lumping together (as "scheme salad" – Schütze 1978, 1976) of the very different operation rules for the three elementary schemes of communication, since they would distort each other. In addition, the various epistemic, i.e. knowledge-generating, powers of the three elementary schemes of communication – specifically for each of them - would be hindered to evolve in an unhampered mode. Both would certainly disorient the informant in her or his presentation work; it could severely and harmfully reduce her or his circumspection regarding the ongoing presentation work, since she or he would be systematically irritated and could not be engrossed by the specific production dynamics of the respective scheme of communication in the sense of free-floating awareness towards the content and flux of rendering (Sigmund Freud).

## 1.6 Summary

The autobiographical narrative interview as a professional arrangement and professional action scheme for the creative generation of knowledge is quite easy to handle, if there is total freedom of participation for the presumptive informant and if there is enough concern that a basic trust relationship will be successfully established during the introductory process of negotiating the possible interview. The autobiographical narrative interview is much easier to handle than, for example, focus groups can be established and successfully carried through, since there can be disinterested participants in the group, the social relationship between the participants might not fit the shared task of embarking on a knowledge generating process, the logistics of bringing the participants together might be extremely difficult in terms of date, place and transportation, etc. Normally the informant is very much intrigued to embark on the task of recollecting her or his life history, since she

or he experiences it as a second chance of getting into it and doing important biographical work not done up to now, through this first opportunity to tell one's life history as an overall gestalt. Unhampered autobiographical story telling is basic biographical work and strengthens the ordering capacity of one's personal identity; therefore, in a free social arrangement without any type of enforcement it supports personal autonomy and personal identity construction. All this also holds true for its use in professional contexts of vocational rehabilitation counselling.

To repeat the basic features of the social arrangement and the action scheme of narrative interviewing in the context of vocational counselling at the very end of this section:

- (a) To the client of vocational counselling, who quite often is not used to explore her or his biographical possibilities of further occupational work, the narrative interview offers a communicative field for unrestrained expression of personal experiences and personal points of view – as unguided by the interviewer as possible. The client of vocational counselling must be carefully oriented towards the importance of her or his own life history, which in the beginning she or he tends to consider as not so important and not a worthwhile topic of talk.
- (b) The sequential order of the action scheme of the narrative interview is: setting a narrative stimulus with the formulation of the central topic, i.e. the personal biography of the informant with a special focus on occupational life, systematic unemployment and the conditioning illness trajectory; the interview section of the main story line; the interview section of internal narrative questioning in order to exhaust the additional narrative potential of the main story line not dwelt on by the informant but intentionally alluded to (through narrative spigots), or at least symptomatically expressed without intention (points of implausibility and discrepancies); the interview section of external narrative questioning according to a categorical grid of expected typical events regarding rehabilitation situations of systematic unemployment as conditioned by a severe chronic illness and regarding the fight against it; the interview section of descriptive questioning regarding social frames, social routines, social situations and structural conditions having an impact on the biographical processes of the informant as biography incumbent, i.e. the rehabilitation client; the interview section of argumentative questioning regarding the self-theoretical reflections of the client of vocational counselling as informant and regarding the overall theoretical potential of the narrative and descriptive renderings of the informant (activated through why-questions).
- (c) Extremely important is the contract work between the client of vocational counselling as prospective informant and the professional as interviewer. There must be an elaborate and sensitive orientation and negotiation phase before the actual beginning of the interview. Especially in this phase working on a trust relationship between the client as prospective informant and the interviewer is important in order to overcome the informant's difficulty to accept the narrative topic of her or his own life history. The interviewer has to make sure that she or he will just follow up the line of autobiographical rendering and biographical work of the client as prospective informant and that she or he will carefully keep her- or himself within this communicative confinement. In later phases of the interview the interviewer will always keep - and sensitively demonstrate to keep - to the basic rule of just supporting the task of the informant to render her or his biographical experiences, reconstruct this through her or his life history and to elaborate her or his biographical work.
- (d) The interviewer always keeps to the conversation role of a listening (and not talking) attitude in the interview communication during the unfolding of the main story line. Even an interviewer who works as professional counsellor should obey the general rule of communicative restraint. In the sections of narrative, descriptive and argumentative

questioning the interviewer always attempts to just elicit the additional potential for the informant's own recollection, rendering and reflection in order to secure the self-evolving quality of the narrative, descriptive and argumentative rendering of the informant. She or he would always attempt to start from pieces of information and formulations questions that just set free the production power of the dominant scheme of communication, especially of narration, which the informant can follow up without any guidance and orientation towards enforced external topics. One basic mistake of the interviewer is cutting the line of rendering of the informant, especially cutting her or his autobiographical story line.

- (e) At points of recollecting difficult life-historical experiences difficult emotional phases can evolve in the interview conversation. The interviewer should make sure that she or he is an understanding listener and would just act as a cooperatively minded human being (and not as a therapeutic professional, which the interviewer cannot claim to be); and if the interviewer would also be a professional counsellor or psychotherapist, she or he should behave in the same way during the interview session; only in the next counselling or therapeutic session could this change, in case the informant as client would accept and/or like to do this). And the interviewer should consider that she or he is under the spell of common responsibility to be a humane interaction partner, and this could involve all types of mundane (and not professional) support. In addition, the informant should create an atmosphere of trust into the constructive ordering capacity of the narrative rendering. She or he should convey: now there would be a sad phase in the narrative recollection, but autobiographical story telling would also provide ways out of it, and sad stories would be followed by better or even happy ones.

## **2. Research steps for single case analysis: text sort differentiation, structural description, analytical abstraction**

There are three work steps for the analysis of a single narrative interview. (The comparison of the analytical outcomes of a single interview with that of other single interviews involves additional research steps.) The three work steps for a single autobiographical narrative interview are: (a) text sort analysis or differentiation; (b) structural description and (c) analytical abstraction, especially reconstructing the overall biographical structuring of the life of the client of vocational rehabilitation (Schütze 1983, 1984).

### **2.1 Text sort differentiation**

Every analysis of a single case autobiographical text material of a socio-biographical process like the Funke interview should start with an analysis of how it has been produced interactively (e.g., in a scientific interview conversation, in a professional counselling session, in a psychotherapeutic setting, etc.) and how it has been edited and rendered into empirical data. Although any qualitative sociological research based on empirical text material should take the verbal representations and interpretations of the interaction partners and biography incumbents seriously, it shouldn't take them at face value. They can be produced in a special social situation and for a special social purpose, e.g. to give a presentation in order to get access to a treatment programme. In addition, there can be some distortions in the recollection, reproduction and self-theoretical explanation of the informants' personal experiences. And, finally, the abbreviated storage and display of autobiographical data by means of summarized interview reports, quickly jotted down ethnographic notes, or some sort of informal transliteration can be highly biased, selective, partial, non-sequential, etc. Therefore it is centrally important to look at the mode of verbal

production of the autobiographical data through specific schemes of communication, whether they are part of naturally occurring encounters of social life or take place within more artificial interview communications, as well as at the way of how the data were stored and displayed by written reports on them.

It is obvious that the mode of interview conversation agreed upon by the researcher and informant, or mistakenly assumed by one interview party or the other, impinges on the nature of information given during the interview. By the mode of interviewing certain types of restrictions are set for recollecting personally experienced events and one's own reactions to them; highly emotional and "private" sections within the flow of recollection are supported or hindered by the communicative arrangement; and the expression of personal attitudes towards the reported sequence of events and of their assessment is freely given or thoroughly controlled and restrained within specific interview arrangements. Now, as we saw already, dense sociological analyses of biographical change connected with individual and collective social processes (like biographical trajectories of suffering or occupational careers as well as collective movements or the breakdown of a societal formation, as in the case of GDR state socialism) are only possible on the empirical base of autobiographical extempore narratives. They activate –as we saw - the cognitive potential and intellectual capacity for recollecting the stream of former life experiences that is stored within the memory of the biography incumbent. Therefore the mode of biographical interviewing should encourage the informant to indulge in the dynamics of recollection in extempore story telling as we showed in the last section. However, the normal understanding of interviewing in public life and of social science researchers is highly formal. Therefore the interviewing researcher might at least partially neglect the rules for autobiographical narrative interviewing and hence misunderstand his role, by asking questions aimed at "hard facts of life" or by immediately starting to elicit general expert statements of the informant. Or it could happen that she or he wouldn't be careful enough in establishing the informant's understanding to tell her or his really individual autobiography and personally reproduce the stream of her/his inner life experiences as freely as possible, following up the concatenation of personal life events. Therefore, in turn, the informant could mistakenly suppose the researcher would expect to hear just "important" life events of her or his encounters with just "salient" social processes, and therefore she or he could refrain from reporting highly personal experiences. Such a general attitude could seriously restrict, distort or even hinder the flow of recollection of biographical experiences.

It is a first decisive partial research task in qualitative sociological biography analysis to study such restrictions and mutual misunderstandings involved in the production of autobiographical materials - especially misunderstandings provoked by systematic restrictions or even communicative mistakes of autobiographical interviewing, as the most frequented avenue towards obtaining biographical data. In assessing the experiential depths and authenticity of autobiographical text materials, the pivotal question is to what extent the text of the original conversation or interview communication would resemble an undirected extempore narration or off-the-cuff story telling, which is as little interrupted and topically guided by the interviewer as possible. As we saw, the communication scheme of narrating personal experiences is the basic communicative mechanism for producing autobiographical recollections, including inner experiences and slighter or bigger changes of personal identity. Especially the most typical common sense understanding and arrangement of interview communication (e.g. the standard "question-answer" type of interview) could considerably distort the flow of extempore narration or could even hinder it to start at all.

In addition to the disorders occurring within the ongoing (interview) communication in producing the narrative material, the task of text analysis could be further obfuscated by non-accurate transcription, vague transliteration, loose glossing, casual rendering or

shortened summarizing of the text production in the interview. Especially by stating some general version of the contents or results of the autobiographical account, as understood by the interviewer, could hinder the researcher's task to get a detailed process or "flow" picture of the interactive and narrative production of the interview. The researcher would be hindered to study the mode of how the informant not only *depicted* his personal experiences but also how she or he *encountered* her or his life historical events in the first place. (I.e., in a very good transcription the latter is largely expressed by the former, if the interviewing researcher had been able to obtain a freely produced extempore narrative of personal experiences from the informant as biography incumbent.)

Thus, the first step of single case analysis could be called "formal textual investigation" or "text sort differentiation". This phase of biography research work entails the following mini-steps: First it has to be investigated, how the autobiographical text material has been produced and in what social activity it has been embedded. This is part of the methodical task of pragmatic refraction, which was discussed in the first part of this module. (E. g., the informant might have felt forced just to give a legitimating account of his personal mischance, difficulties, mistakes or mischief and not to search for her or his own hidden intentions, experiences and meanings that are part of the conditions of her or his present predicament, in order to gain entry into a retraining programme.) Secondly, it must be studied how interviewer and informant understood the special interview arrangement of producing the *life historical* account in their interaction. (E.g., if we are confronted with a laconic type of rendering by the informant as we in the beginning of the Funke interview: had the informant really and explicitly been told and did she or he really understand that she or he was expected to tell her or his personal life history and not just to present a formal curriculum vitae? We could look at the negotiation of the action scheme of interviewing in the introductory phase of the interview communication: Was the idea of the personal life history really conveyed to the informant? If yes: Is the laconic rendering a special way of authentic autobiographical narration and why? In the case of the Funke interview, although it starts quite laconically, we can see many features of extempore autobiographical narration, such as attempts to express feelings notwithstanding the emotional barriers as well as background constructions to repair former attempts of fading out in order to circumvent the expression of difficult feelings.) And what would be the possible misunderstandings conditioned by the interview format and the communicative arrangement and what would be their impact on the ongoing interview communication? Thirdly it has to be delineated within the autobiographical text material where and how other communicative schemes than narration (namely, argumentation and description) occur and what their representational and communicative function would be (Schütze 1987). They could have supported the working and dynamics of the narrative scheme of communication - e.g. by drawing pictures of social situations or by "self-theoretical" activities stating and/or explaining the outcomes of (chains of) socio-biographical events and processes. But unfortunately they also could have helped the informant to circumvent autobiographical extempore narration of personal experiences proper by evading into thin abstract descriptions of social frames, without telling what happened in them and how the informant would have been involved, as well as by taking recourse to empty general statements of "world principles" allegedly connected with socio-biographical processes but without telling how oneself had been involved in them and how one was playing a responsible part in them. Fourthly (and again starting from the very beginning as seen in terms of practical research work): especially in cases where the autobiographical text material was not elicited and/or put on paper by the researcher her- or himself (e. g. when an external interviewer had been hired or when a collection of published edited interviews should be used as, for example the interview volumes of Studs Terkel), but also in cases where transcribing the researcher-conducted interview was done in a vague way and the

analysis is done much later (i.e. if the interviewer and researcher cannot remember the interview communication in a detailed way), she or he additionally has to ask how much and in what direction the text material was edited. Of course, the same holds true for texts of autobiographical writers (as we have many published personal reports on severe chronic illness and or on predicaments of long-term unemployment). In all these cases one must ask in what direction the reworking of the original interview text or the authentic experiences has been accomplished. (E.g., if we take one of the famous monographs of the Chicago Sociology, “The Jack Roller”, ed. by Clifford Shaw (1966), we can see how the narrator and author Stanley – prodded by his conversation partner Clifford Shaw - would attempt to demonstrate the successful career aspects of his life as a delinquent adolescent, fade out of his presentation awareness most experiences of depression, i.e. the trajectory aspects of suffering, and show the infectious function of personal contacts with other young criminals – especially during his times spent in houses of correction and prisons.) And then one could use this information regarding the reworking and editing process in order to assess the text validity (in terms of expression of authentic experiences), the import of melodramatic or laconic strings of the edited text and the meaning of opaque textual formulations.

## **2.2 Sequential structural description**

The second step of the interpretive analysis of a single case autobiographical text material is the sequential structural description of the textual presentation, i.e. its sequence of presentational units. If the communicative scheme of narration is dominant in the autobiographical interview or in the autobiographical text production, there are mostly "autonomous" narrative segments or units, as we saw in the first part of this module, because any of them could be a narrative by itself, although they are connected with each other in supra-segmental meta-units that express the biographical process structures, in which the biography incumbent is involved, and her or his longer range identity development. Of course in every autobiographical narrative interview, as we saw in the previous chapter, there will also be dominantly descriptive and argumentative presentational units, since there is the questioning part in the interview arrangement on social frames and the additional questioning part on the explication and expansion of theoretical consideration of the informant and the explanatory questions of the interviewer. And in addition, even in the beginning of the main story part that is freely produced by the informant without any prodding and thematic redirection by the interviewer, there is the pre-coda element and the coda element, which normally involve intensive argumentative presentation activities expressing the reflective biographical work of the informant. Finally, as we look into the single narrative units, there will quite often be descriptive explications of social frames and argumentative elaborations of higher predicates of experiences, of difficult questions regarding the course of outer events and inner developments and their relationships to each other as well as the reflective biographical work, i.e. argumentative commentaries connected to it. But basically the communicative scheme of narration will be dominant.

Therefore, the structural description has to be conducted mainly in orientation to the formal features, especially the presentation and demonstration markers of the main narrative and the narrative units of the first questioning part, which reveal the relationships of the informant as biography incumbent to the narrated flow of life historical events, how she or he experienced them and how her or his personal identity and biographical work developed by the involvement in them. The formal presentation of the narrative scheme refers to single narrative units, to the supra-segmental markers of the biographical process structures and the global shape of the overall life history and its overall biographical

structuring. Their careful observation will deliver the general grid for the picture of the flow of the biographical processes and the involved identity development. In addition, the structural description has to be concerned with the biographical and social contents transpired by the narrative. The narrative presentation and demonstration markers explicitly point out or latently express biographical and social processes with their perspective of outer events and their perspective of inner experiences and identity changes. Basically these contents have to be envisioned as structural processes (Anselm Strauss – Glaser and Strauss 1968: chapter XI) of the various "self-historical" phases of the life course, of the overall biographical unfolding as such, of the social processes linked with life course phases and with the overall biographical unfolding (such as important relationships of significant others to the biography incumbent).

Of course, there are formal features of the communicative scheme of description and argumentation, too. They can be used in the same way as the scheme of narration is used in order to establish an empirical base of formal features for the research step of structural description, which can guide the analytical reconstruction of biographical and social processes without a freewheeling and loose interpretation. But their formal markers are different from those of the communicative scheme of narration (and, in addition, more complicated than those of narration). Since the scheme of narration is dominant in the textual rendering of the successful autobiographical narrative interview, the formal presentation markers of the two other communicative schemes are not that pivotal to accomplish the overall structural description of narrative interviews, and therefore they will be addressed in a more informal, interpretive way where it will be necessary, i.e. where the informant will embark on descriptive and argumentative activities. Especially the activities of reflective biographical work (as evolving in theoretical commentaries at the end of segments, in the pre-coda segment, in the coda segment as well as in the explanatory and questioning part of the interview) will harness the scheme of argumentation and present important subjects of the research task of structural description.

The systematic description of the biographical and social structural processes has to be done by both using the presentation and demonstration markers of the scheme of narration in general and of the biographical process structures specifically (see the first part of this module). The substantive language of the informant contains features of distinctive personal experiences, general features of the concatenation of her or his life-historical events, of encountered social frames and of biographical identity unfolding and biographical work. These are partially just alluded to by generalizing higher predicates and partially formulated by means of more explicit argumentation and description. The informant's language also uses the language of sociological categories of structural processes and social frames (partially developed from the formal presentation markers of the narrative, descriptive and argumentative rendering of social and biographical processes) for the trans-individually reproducible interpretation and generalizing explanation of the biographical experiences. The language can be informant-formulated and –acknowledged (originally coined or personally adopted in its wording). The latter sociological categories of structural description operate as reconstructive connectors, explanation and generalization devices for the (implicitly general) presentation and demonstration markers of socio-biographical processes and of social frames, as well as translation and interpretation vocabulary for the interpretive exploitation of the case specific formulation of personal experiences, of hints of distinct or even extraordinary characteristics of the individual biographical case and implicit theoretical notions rendered by the informant's presentation markers, explanatory commentaries and self-theoretical characterizations. By means of conjunction of the formal presentation markers, of the substantive formulations of the informant and of the sociological process categories the informant's depictions can be approached analytically, and that means: they are seen "pragmatically refracted" in the

context of the informant's actions, sufferings, enactments of institutional expectation patterns and metamorphosis processes as entangling, engrossing and involving biographical and social processes (see the first part of this module).

Central to structural description is the analysis of the single narrative units and of their sequential concatenation within supra-segmental process units. The central epistemic task of the research step of structural description, i.e. pragmatic refraction, can be accomplished by taking analytically into account these textual contexts. Pragmatic refraction doesn't take the textual formulations at face value. It searches for the social and biographical processes that are consciously and non-consciously expressed by the textual rendering. Part of these processes are just seen but unnoticed by the informant or even faded out of one's memory and awareness and only symptomatically expressed. Structural description reconstructs the textual microstructures of the narrative units and their supra-segmental concatenation by delineating the orientation and presentation perspective of the narrative unit, by focussing on the presentation markers of it and delineating the sequential unfolding of the presentation activities of the narrative unit according to an elementary presentational order of the narrative unit, as well as searching for textual phenomena of experiential disorder and fading out, especially background constructions, and explaining their disorder within the contexts of the unfolding (chaotic) socio-biographical processes. Structural description reconstructs the polythetic presentation activities for the expression of socio-biographical processes, i.e. their introduction, their central statement in kernel sentences with an outer and an inner dimension, with situational detailing, with the depiction of social frames, with argumentative evaluations, critiques and self-theoretical commentaries as well as with attempts of fading out difficult experiences and the repair of these chaotic presentation activities by background constructions and other corrective devices. The polythetic presentation activities quite often are ambivalent in themselves, in mirroring the complicated (ambivalent or even contradictory or enigmatic) socio-biographical processes. The sequential reconstruction of the unfolding presentation activities and of their result, the textual microstructures of the narrative units and their supra-segmental sequences, allows the analytical view from the side line, which puts together general presentation perspectives, formulaic expressions and presentation disorder, on the one hand, and substantive renderings, on the other. Through this textual and socio-biographical contextualization, reconstruction and pragmatic refraction, the analytical depiction of even unnoticed or faded-out and ambivalent or enigmatic social and biographical processes will be possible. – In the next chapter we will deal in a detailed way with the analysis of the textual microstructures of extempore narrative rendering as the core of structural description, as the most central research step of qualitative text analysis.

### **2.3 Putting together partial structural descriptions of topically related strings of presentation in the main story part and the questioning parts of the interview**

The last important sub-step of structural description consists of putting together the informational chunks extracted from the analysis of strings of presentation in the three parts of the autobiographical narrative interview dealing with the same event constellation and the same process of biographical identity change. It is quite common that the main story line of a narrative interview is shorter than the combination of its several interrogatory parts. Such an "incremental" unfolding of the narrative interview especially happens to informants who are not very much experienced in looking into the inner realm of their identity development and/or who are not used to give presentations of their personal experiences. In addition, it is not so easy to manage the beginning of the main story part, if there are biographical phases of incisive trajectory experiences and severe suffering to be reported, as we can see in the case of Bernd Funke, who was thrown out of the elite sports

school in his adolescence, who was forced to learn an occupation he did not like, who was long-term unemployed, who contracted a severe chronic illness and who was finally abandoned by his girl friend. It is not easy to tell about these very sad experiences one after the other in the very first sections of an interview, and therefore one could understandably prefer to confine oneself to a very laconic rendering. (But normally after a while the constraints of story telling, especially those of going into details and of closing the presentational forms, and the overall aesthetic productivity of extempore story telling cause the informant – step by step – to tell his story more lively and more explicitly.)

Nevertheless, even a quite *short* main story line of an autobiographical narrative interview can prove to be very enlightening, since it expresses the sequence and concatenation of biographical process structures (or biographical contexts) in the most straightforward way. Especially the high points of biographical processes, the changes between biographical processes, i.e. the turning points of biography, and the eclipses of socio-biographical processes are expressed in a quite condensed and sequentially contextualised way during a comparatively laconic presentation of the main story line. Such process-structural phenomena will be marked by fat letters in the shortened version of the structural description of the Funke interview to be documented in a later section of this module. - However, the more detailed interrogatory parts of the interviews which follow after the main story line can give important clarifications – especially regarding severe experiences of suffering or shame, which are not or only elusively dwelt on in the main story line. (Quite often they are treated in a quite laconic way or even faded out of awareness in the main story line).

Out of the following reasons the questioning parts of the narrative interview normally consist of textual strings of more detailed presentations: First of all, it is encouraging for the informant to realize that the interviewer is so much interested in her or his life history, as shown by her or his additional narrative questioning. Now the (quite often very modest) informant is emotionally able to believe, that something must be relevant regarding her or his life history. Secondly, through the permanently ongoing dynamics of the recollection power of extempore autobiographical story telling, in dealing with personal involvements and experiences, the informant is again drawn into her or his former life, she or he gets encouraged to see the importance of it; and in the very process of the ongoing autobiographical extempore narration she or he learns and gets used to express episodes, social frames and inner feelings of her or his life historical involvements (see the first part of the module). The recollection power is mainly elicited by the very activity of autobiographical story telling and its constraints of extempore narration, but it is even more strengthened by the encouraging additional narrative questions of the interviewer exhausting the additional story potential as alluded to by the informant. Being confronted with the dynamics of extempore story telling in this double way is a very productive and even enthusiastic experience for the informant, since telling one's whole life history is quite often performed by the informant for the first time in his or her life by virtue of the interview arrangement. - Looking at the questioning parts of the narrative interview helps the researcher to clarify difficult phases and situations in the informant's life, to overcome the "rubber fence" of the informant's fading-out practices and to get at the more or less insightful or self-delusional self-explanations and self-theories of the informant regarding her or his life course. Especially two functions of combining the structural descriptions of topically connected or topically more or less identical strings of the main story part and the questioning part are important:

- (a) Explicating the laconic narrative kernel sentences of the main story line and their higher predicates by the analysis of topically related, more detailed textual strings in the internal narrative questioning part; as well as



search for an apprenticeship and vocational school, the informant conveys: “you were just put into something” (lines 20 and 21). And the way in and through the apprenticeship “was very clear” and “very straight forward” (lines 29 and 30). Again both higher predicates are quite vague and difficult to interpret in a more detailed way. From the first it might be surmised, that the apprenticeship Bernd Funke got was not his personal choice, was not liked by him and could have led to an occupational (self) alienation. But, of course, this is not clear from the text. From the second higher predicate one could extract the idea that the apprenticeship would have developed into an unproblematic career line, but it isn’t clear how. In addition, there seems to be an irritating discrepancy between experiences of occupational self-alienation and of an unproblematic straightforward educational and occupational career. In addition, there is some announcement of a gap of recollection and of postponed biographical work: “where I have thought about that later on” (lines 12 and 13), announcing the necessity of a background presentation. There is the allusion in the text of the first narrative unit onto such a necessary background presentation: the narrator gives the background information that he always loved and practiced a lot of sport and that therefore he decided to go to the elite sports school, and this small bit of an explanation (lines 13 and 14) thus hints at a tragedy of wrong biographical decision and a loss of several years of learning and education, of sound and realistic biographical planning, when he had to leave the special sports school. But this is just an elliptical conjecture; it could only be corroborated though a close analysis of respective more detailed presentations dealing with these topics again within the immanent narrative questioning part of the interview, since such presentations have been carefully elicited by the interviewer, who realized points of textual vagueness and discrepancy. Such a close analysis of the respective textual strings in the immanent narrative questioning part will be presented in the next section.

To combine the structural descriptions of the narrative or presentational units of the main story line with the structural descriptions of the topically corresponding presentational units of the questioning parts of the interview, especially of the narrative part(s), has the general methodological function of putting together multiple analytical insights into life historically and thematically concordant textual items from the various textual parts of the narrative interview. The deeper epistemological and methodological background considerations of this pasting or collating procedure are two: Firstly, one must consider the interplay between the power of structural ordering devices of narrative rendering regarding the cognitive figures of autobiographical narratives as, for example: “local” life-historical event constellations (partially episodes) and the related personal experiences, longer lasting biographical process structures of the life course as well as the overall whole life history, as a “gestalt”, on the one hand, and the power of the narrative constraints and their chaotic dynamics with the effect to be drawn by disorderly narrative presentation activities, especially background constructions, into almost forgotten or faded-out disorderly experiential phenomena of the life history, on the other hand. Secondly, one must make use of the power of the knowledge-generating machinery of extempore autobiographical narration to be again drawn into and to be again emotionally engrossed within the stream of recollected former life-historical experiences. During the course of the unfolding autobiographical extempore narration the creative impact of this machinery gets more and more powerful: the aesthetics and the insights by virtue of one’s own presentation work in extempore narration are greatly enjoyable and sensitize the recollection and awareness of the informant: memories come back, biographical relevancies are seen again or become newly detected, and the aesthetic shaping and expressing of personal experiences creates more and more fun and pleasure.

## 2.4 Analytical abstraction of the single case

The third step of single case analysis of an autobiographical narrative interview is the analytical abstraction of what is special "case distinctive" and of what are general features of the case, which are theoretically remarkable. It can be imagined that certain features of the case could also be found within other cases, some would help to theoretically differentiate between various types of cases, still others would demonstrate the case as essentially unique in the sense of its "self-historical gestalt", e.g., the combination of several severe trajectories in the life situation of Bernd Funke as an adolescent: being barred from a promising career line as elite state athlete and losing one's biographical meaning, being forced into a self-alienating vocational training and occupation, losing one's social contacts, being out of work for long periods and becoming afflicted by a severe chronic illness. The analytical abstraction explicates the pivotal features reoccurring throughout the case and combines them into overall biographical forms, which are constitutive for the case. In the case of Bernd Funke we can see his lack of competence to focus on himself and to do biographical work, as well as his vulnerability and disposition to accept any kind of institutional expectation and ascription without asking oneself and testing if it would fit his own development of personal identity.

Most important is the reconstruction of the linkage, concatenation, imbeddedness and domination, competition, overlap, intertwining of the various structural processes of biography: together they form a distinctive biographical whole or overall biographical structuring: in the case of Bernd Funke the sequential order and simultaneous interface of several types of trajectories (see above), of an institutional processing of therapeutic help and vocational retraining, of developing and following up a biographical action scheme of becoming an administrative clerk and of embarking on a metamorphosis process of stepping from the social world of manual work into the social world of paper work and mental work. Some aspects of the biographical process structures and the overall biographical structuring can of course be grasped by the biography incumbent herself or himself, by means of her or his own theories about herself or himself; other aspects cannot be grasped. Therefore the research step of analytical abstraction also deals with the relationships between the accomplishments of the biography incumbent in self-reflection and self-theorizing on the one hand and the flow of the factual structural processes of biography on the other. For this purpose, all the interspersed self-theoretical activities of the informant should be collated and analyzed for a possible (partially latent) underlying theoretical system of self-explanation. In the case of Bernd Funke, part of it would be his distorted idea of the benign and productive function of his capacity and habit to identify with every type of external institutional task, as he might have learnt it in the people processing institutions of education and training in the GDR.

Finally the analytical abstraction addresses the interlink of biographical processes proper of the case and other social phenomena and collective changes as revealed in the case (e.g. the relationship between the breakdown of the societal formation of state socialism in the GDR, on the one hand, and the loss of work opportunities of Bernd Funke in his learned occupation as fitter of heavy machinery as well as his biographical trajectory of unemployment, on the other). Some of these interlinks endanger the autonomous development of personal identity, as the superimposition did of the non-preferred apprenticeship in the life of Bernd Funke, others support it tremendously – as Bernd Funke's introduction to the social world of administrative paper work.

### **3. The analysis of the textual microstructures of narrative units as the analytical core of structural description**

Textual microstructures provide the sequential contexts for the constitution and functioning of the meso- and macro-structural textual phenomena of cognitive figures and the social and biographical processes they express (see the first part of the module). Only through the creative line-by-line production of textual micro-structures is the emergence of new textual expressions and respective socio-biographical phenomena possible, and only through this can the power of conditional relevancies of former presentation activities and phases of socio-biographical processes be set free, which they exert on later presentation activities and process phases. The research step of structural description closely reconstructs this creative productivity of extempore autobiographical narration for detecting and formulating new socio-biographical phenomena. The knowledge generating power of the communicative scheme of extempore narration of personal experiences thus becomes observable.

#### **3.1 The structure and analysis of narrative units**

The textual microstructure of an extempore autobiographical narrative is constituted by the sequential production of single narrative units. A single narrative unit or narrative segment is the basic building block of an overall autobiographical narrative. Each of these narrative units could be an autonomous narrative itself. The basic ingredient of an elementary extempore narration of personal experiences is minimally one kernel sentence depicting a social or biographical process that passes over a time threshold of a ‘before’ and a ‘later on’. In addition, such a kernel sentence has another basic quality: it depicts an outer event or row of outer events, on the one hand, and the planning and production of the outer event(s) or the reaction to it or them by the story carrier (or biography incumbent), on the other hand, and the latter means: change of the inner state of the subject of that activity (or activities) and/or reaction(s). Thus, the minimal kernel sentence of extempore narration of personal experiences must normally have binominal characteristics: it depicts outer events and the related inner changes – at least smallest processes of identity change - of the subject of the experience(s) and activity (activities). If one of the two aspects of the binominal characteristics is missing, then that is a deviating presentation phenomenon and it expresses a certain type of disorderliness of personal experiences (e. g., it could be conditioned by the fact that the trajectory experience is so hurting that the narrator doesn’t like or is even unable to depict his or her inner state). Quite often a single narrative unit produces more than one kernel sentence. In this case, one kernel sentence could depict the outer event(s) and another kernel sentence the change of the inner state of the subject (the story carrier and the biography incumbent). The elementary quality of a kernel sentence in autobiographical story telling is the expression of at least one minimal life historical gestalt or episodic life historical story. And the basic grammar of it is the mutual conditional relationship between outer event(s) and a change of identity of the subject involved in that event or those events. This we already called the self-historical gestalt of autobiographical story telling. - Many narrative units are much more elaborate than that minimal textual structure we were discussing just before. A full-sized narrative unit is constituted out of the following structural presentation activities: frame switching elements, introductions to narrative units, textual sections of narrative detailing, textual sections of descriptive or argumentative detailing, background constructions of narrative or argumentative nature for the better understanding of “difficult experiences”, argumentative commentaries for explanation or legitimising, securing the results and evaluations.

Let us look at how the cognitive figures (Schütze 1984, 1987) are presented in a single narrative unit of the autobiographical rendering of a biographical process structure of the trajectory of occupational self-alienation. The narrator Bernd Funke has told how he was kicked out of a GDR elite sports school and transferred into an unloved apprenticeship of plumber and fitter for heavy machinery. Later he doesn't find a stable position in this occupation, since heavy machinery construction was totally dismantled in East Germany and because of his lack of identification with his learnt occupation and the lack of confidence connected with it, he did not dare to change to West Germany. In addition, he was afflicted by the severe chronic illness of Morbus Bechterev, which finally forced him out of his learnt occupation. He then was in a very depressive mood, and his girl friend left him. From this context of the unfolding of his life history emerges the following narrative unit:

6 I couldn't pay my rent anymore (-) were unemployed (^)  
7 I mhm  
8 M and eh . was alone (-) .  
9 well that was actually a really deep low point let me say that like that (,)  
10 I yes  
11 M yes(?) /// there  
12 I was actually really deep down (,). and eh . my life looked like that actually  
13 right (?) . a lot of alcohol came to that (^) . well practically . really (-) . well how  
14 should I say (-) just so . hanging/  
15 I mhm  
16 M hanging around (,)  
17 I yes yes  
18 M and ehm .  
19 I a lot of things are  
20 coming together then (-)  
21 M some things come together right (?) . that was going on  
22 to the eviction/ well eviction of my flat that/ had to leave the flat  
23/27 and and and (-) ./// there: my parents have actually then have helped me a lot (,)  
*(Funke interview, page 3, lines 6 to 27; the graphic sign of three slashes “///” designates the beginning and the end of the narrative unit)*

Just to name the general features of this narrative unit and the cognitive figures:

- securing the result and evaluation of the foregoing narrative segment:  
“9 well that was actually a really deep low point let me say that like that (,)”
- frame switching element between the two narrative units following each other:  
”9 M (,)  
10 I yes  
11 M yes(?)”
- introduction to narrative unit and supra-segmental marker of trajectory:  
“11 /// there  
I was actually really deep down (,)”
- kernel sentences of trajectory experience and identity change of the story carrier:  
(a) “11M /// there  
I was actually really deep down (,). and eh . my life looked like that actually right?”  
[first half of sentence sequence is depicting the inner state; second half the outer state]

(b) “13 . a lot of alcohol came to that (˘)”

- textual sections of descriptive or argumentative detailing with rudimentary reference to the cognitive figure of situation:

“13 well practically . really (-) . well how  
 14 hould I say (-) just so . hanging/  
 15 I mhm  
 16 M hanging around (.)  
 17 I yes yes”

- textual sections of descriptive or argumentative detailing; here only incipiently realized:

“19 I a lot of things are  
 20 coming together then (-)  
 21 M some things come together right (?)”

- background constructions for the better understanding of difficult experiences:  
*see below*

- securing the results and evaluations:

“21 M that was going on  
 to the eviction/ well eviction of my flat that/ had to leave the flat”

- argumentative commentaries for explanation or legitimising, here realised only in an extremely rudimentary way, but alluding to the mechanisms of cumulative mess:  
“23 and and and (-)”

- the cognitive figure of event carrier: the family members, who would help him in his predicament:

“23/27 there: my parents have actually then have helped me a lot (,)”

- The cognitive figure of social frame, in one case the absence of it, in the other its presence:

“M and eh . was alone (-)”  
 “23/27 there: my parents have actually then have helped me a lot (,)”.

### 3.2 Background constructions

Especially background constructions (Schütze 1981, 1987, 2001) demonstrate that extempore autobiographical narrations express even personal experiences that the narrator tended to fade out of her or his awareness, since they were so difficult, hurting or shameful. Background constructions are self-corrections of the narrator regarding the course of her or his narrative rendering at points of its implausibility. They are quite often initiated by the narrator her- or himself, when during her or his permanent self-monitoring she or he realizes that the course of presentation becomes questionable, inconsistent, discrepant or even contradictory, enigmatic, phony, etc. Then the narrator is driven by the narrative constraint of going into details. The narrator understands that something is missing between a rendering of event A and a following rendering of event B: e. g. having been kicked out from the career line of the elite sports school (event A) and embarking on the career schedule of the apprenticeship of heavy machinery fitter with the ordinary attitude of a young optimistic apprentice (event B). The missing link is the painful trajectory experience of occupational self-alienation, which the narrator inserts between the recapitulation of

events A und B via a long background construction. And the insertion of the background construction then changes the former rendering of event B in a dramatic way: it changes the quality of an unproblematic attitude of an optimistic career expectation into the quality of a gloomy trajectory trap.

Of course the narrator looks at the point of implausibility from the presumed perspective of real and/or imagined addressees by means of the Meadian type of taking the role of the other (Mead 1934), but this doesn't mean that a favorable presentation of oneself to the others is the central concern of the narrator. Instead, in extempore autobiographical story telling she or he is most concerned about the plausibility of her recapitulation of personal experiences to her- or himself. The narrator would like to understand difficult experiences faded out (Schütze 1989, 1992) up to now or enigmatic experiences she or he had forgotten about. And she or he would like to assess their importance for her or his life history and identity development and to understand their origins and mechanisms of unfolding. Finally, she or he would like to assure her- or himself about the continuity and the inner logic of one's own identity development. Of course, in addition, it is important that these self-images are corroborated through the listener who by this becomes an important cooperation partner for the biographical work of the narrator. – Background constructions can also be initiated by the listener or interviewer; in this case the latter is pointing to the point of implausibility in a cautious way, just stating that she or he did not understand how the story line would go on, re-starting from the last plausible sequence of rendering immediately before the occurrence of the textual point of implausibility. Aware of the fact that a point of implausibility always expresses a difficult life experience, the listener will be very careful and gentle in her or his questioning. Quite often the narrator then feels the encouragement to look at her or his faded out difficult experiences or at enigmatic turns of affairs and event constellations.

Background constructions react to chaotic phases in the extempore recollection of personal experiences; in a certain sense their repair mechanism should bring back order into the chaotic phases of narrative rendering and the connected recollections of sedimented biographical experiences. But they normally accomplish this without any polishing, refurbishing and euphemistic reinterpretation of the recollected experiences, if and when they can fully unfold and carry through their repair job. Insofar the insertion of background constructions is the diametrical contrast to fading out, rationalisation and legitimising, on the level of the dominant line of narrative rendering. The order that is introduced by the fully accomplished background construction is much more complicated than the original order of the narrative rendering. Therefore background constructions are an important means for creative biographical work. – In their origin, their unfolding and finishing, background constructions are the result of the impact of the three narrative constraints in their competition.

### **3.3 Fading out, narrative constraints and background constructions**

Firstly, on the level of the dominant story line there operates the narrative constraint of condensing and of grading the relevancies of life historical experiences to be recalled. It serves as a device to recapitulate only the central knots of the experienced life history and its biographical process structures. On the one hand, this enhances the transparency and the analytical insight into one's own life history, because the overall biographical structuring has to be abstracted and assessed. And in addition, the constraint of condensing also exerts an epistemic power to construct and reassess hierarchies of what is more important and what is less important during the overall course of one's own life history. On the other hand, the narrative constraint of condensing strengthens the simplifying tendency of just



alienation, gets then re-interpreted by the next kernel sentence: “and there I’ve made my two/two and a half years ((quieter till+)) ...made my training for fitter of power-plant then + “ (lines”13 to 15) into the presentation of an ordinary course of apprenticeship career, i.e. into an normatively oriented expectation pattern. Of course, this is the impact of the narrative constraint of condensing. If one could get away as narrator (as well as listener, monitoring one’s own narrative rendering of personal experiences) with this neutralizing or down-playing interpretation of the occupational course after having been kicked out of a satisfying career line and having been put into a superimposed and unloved apprenticeship instead, it wouldn’t be necessary to deal with any biographical complications in the autobiographical rendering, and the course of presentation could be kept unproblematic and short. In order to accomplish this neutralizing interpretation, the narrator adds a self-theoretical commentary: “that as I said was that what actually everybody did here (,). ...:> o.k.(?)<:” (lines 17 to 20), which underlines the usual, regular, common, normal quality of what had happened to him in having been put into that apprenticeship as machine fitter. Of course, all these are activities of fading-out practices regarding the real quality of the biographical process structure in the life situation of Bernd Funke after having been thrown out of the elite sport school.

But then, still focused upon the phenomena on the level of the dominant story line, the narrator monitors her- or himself and realizes that these fading-out and re-normalizing practices of presentation cause the occurrence of points of implausibility in the course of her or his narrative rendering. These phenomena of implausibility must not have been expressed in palpable linguistic phenomena on the text surface of the dominant presentation level of the story line (like linguistic contradictions such as “a little bit awful”, the massive occurrence of hesitation phenomena or phenomena of self-corrections). It can be just the phenomenon of non-sequitur of the rendering of event B following the rendering of event A, if and when the two are integrated typical parts of totally different biographical process structures, which do not fit each other. In our textual example of the Funke interview there is the contrast between the trajectory language and the language of a normal career in the same narrative unit. This discrepancy documents, that at this point of narrative presentation, there is something wrong with the presentation of the essential features of the biographical process structure(s) that are dominant here and now. I.e., there is the narrator’s superimposition of a career concept of biographical process structure (regarding the vocational training as machine fitter) on the authentic trajectory experiences of occupational self-alienation of the biography incumbent, as we have seen already (e. g, “that was all of a sudden (‘). that was like struck by lightening (‘)+. everything at once (-)” – page 10, lines 41 and 42; “(‘). and zap!, chop-chop, that was it and I’ve been slipped into that” - page 11, line 13), and consequentially, by this superimposition, the latter expression of suffering gets a normalizing re-interpretation and tends to be faded out. There is the feeling of a non-sequitur regarding the event(s) A connected to the experience of the biographical process structure of trajectory and the presumed event(s) B of a normal, smoothly going career development.

As we said already, the narrator is permanently monitoring her- or himself from the imagined standpoint of the listener through the interactive mechanism of role taking, and at such points of implausibility she or he becomes concerned to be inconsistent in her or his narrative presentation – regarding the correct temporal succession, the correct conditional implication, the correct intentional orientation, the correct logic of the unfolding of involved, especially dominant, biographical process structures, etc.. Such an inconsistency not only causes the problem of presumed untrustworthiness in the eyes of the listener, but at the same time it provokes the poignant question or even the self-accusation of being inauthentic to oneself. And here the narrative constraint of going into details starts to exert its epistemic power. It is focused on the attempt to restore the plausibility of one’s narrative

rendering. It starts a background search of the hidden and/or faded out experiences of life-historical events between the reported event(s) A and B as well as for the inner and outer reasons of the renormalizing or even fading-out activities of presentation. Hidden experiences are “suppressed” by the superimposition of another, i.e. renormalizing type of categorization and rendering.

In our textual example there first is the doubtful question “:> o.k.(?)<: “ (page 11, line 20) of the narrator himself, whether his re-normalization statement regarding the ordinary quality of the institutional expectation and career pattern of the apprenticeship of becoming a machine fitter would be convincing at all, and therefore the interviewer feels entitled to step in with cautious and sympathetic questions regarding Bernd Funke’s passing from the elite sports school to his apprenticeship as machine fitter, by alluding to the trajectory experience (here marked by grey shadowing):

17 M that as I said was that what actually everybody did  
 18 here (,).  
 19 I yeah. yeah.  
 20 M :> o.k.(?)<:  
 21 I /// yes. well I believe that/ . yes I can understand  
 22 the transition to the first training better now (,)  
 23 M yes  
 24 I well you  
 25 indicate that earlier on but/ so in all the dimensions I could  
 26 understand that argument ehm. ehm. did you have in that situation  
 27 when that (-) . that must have come very sudden (-)  
 28 M yes  
 29 I . suddenly it was clear  
 30 that the development in the direction of sports didn’t go any further(-)  
 31 you haven’t been chosen (-) . did you have any ideas for yourself  
 32 at all what you want to do (?)  
 33 M no not at all  
 34 I did you not have ( )  
 35 M I couldn’t think  
 36 of anything (‘)  
 37 I yes  
 38 M ehm. there haven’t been any ideas (,). nothing (,)  
 (page 11, lines 17 to 38; the beginning of the background construction is marked by gray shadowing)

This narrative background construction is elicited by the listening interviewer, but we saw that it is pre-arranged by the narrator, since he is addressing his doubtful “o.k.?” - question to the listener. And then the narrator cooperatively starts to embark on the trajectory experience he wanted to skip first: “I couldn’t think of anything (‘) ...ehm. There haven’t been any ideas (,). nothing (,)” (line 35 to 38). After this stammering beginning of his background presentation the narrator then goes on to deal with the gloomy future auspices of the trajectory quite elaborately: “and then maybe doorkeeper with 50 sometime(‘) . and that was it then (,). right (?)” (page 12, lines 7 and 8). But finally, in his autobiographical recapitulation the narrator cannot emotionally stand this first future projection, i.e. the former conclusion as young apprentice regarding his future, and therefore he fades out of his awareness his former depressing outlook into his personal future by giving a re-normalizing assessment of his former life situation: “that was it then (-)...so (,). now begins the/your daily life (-)” (page 12, lines 13 to 15).

### 3.4 Second order background constructions

At the same time this last reworking and phony conclusion functions as the built-up of the condition for an additional narrative background construction, which is now triggered by the narrator himself. This additional background construction is a self-correction device connected with the self-accusing commentary of the narrator Mr. Funke of having forgotten something in his own presentation. The narrator conveys, that the forgotten item of experience might be important for the understanding of the trap character of his trajectory experience of occupational self-alienation (Riemann 1987) with its gloomy future auspices, which at the beginning he, the story carrier and narrator, was only able to stand emotionally by a fading out practice of forgetting and by mundane re-normalization:

15 M so (,) now begins the/your daily life (-).  
 16 // although eh I have to say of course (-). ehm (-) I totally forgot that earlier  
 17 on (,) I have during the/during the trade school (-) . right (?).  
 18 there were such GST camps here (-)/

*(page 12, lines 16 to 18; the beginning of the second order background construction is marked by the graphic sign “//”)*

Mr. Funke's self-monitoring of his almost brutal or self-afflicting and widely unrealistic re-normalization (marked by gray shadowing) within the course of his narrative rendering is a trigger mechanism that provokes a second order narrative background construction in the midst of a first order background construction, when the narrative rendering of the trajectory experience (its trap-like character and its gloomy future auspices) becomes so hurting, that the narrator - here identified with the story carrier - reverts to a device of mundane renormalization. The provocation of the second order background construction is again the result of the impact of the narrative constraint of going into details.

The second order narrative background construction tells that young Bernd Funke, then so solidly trapped in his former predicament of vocational self-alienation did not fade out everything from his (former) awareness, since he tried to find a rescue exit out of that trajectory trap by applying for vocational training at the organization of the GDR riot police after having met knowledgeable persons in the paramilitary youth organization for “Sports and Technique” (GST). But this rescue way would have been a move equivalent to falling from the frying pan into the fire, since the narrator makes totally clear that he wouldn't have liked to use this way out; rather he was talked into it by other persons, including his father. (In addition, it was later on made impossible by the breakdown of the GDR.) Thus, the second order background construction further elaborates the features of the trajectory process of occupational self-alienation, in which Bernd Funke had been trapped in during his imposed apprenticeship: especially the feature, that there was no real way out of the trajectory trap in the true sense of biographical rescue from self-alienation. If we remember that the first order background construction also elaborated the features of the trajectory process – the disorientation (“empty head”), the mental paralysis, the gloomy future auspices with its fateful character, etc. - , we can draw the more general conclusion, that, as we said above, background constructions bring back order to the chaotic phases of narrative rendering and the connected recollections of chaotic biographical experiences sedimented in one's memory. But the secondary order accomplished by the means of background construction is the higher order of the dynamic unfolding of chaos character, connected with deep suffering, of the biographical process structure of trajectory. (Those chaotic phenomena of life history and biographical unfolding have their own conditional and sequential order of being forces and estranged, which we cannot deal with here.) The insight into this higher order of dynamic unfolding of the chaos character of biographical trajectory and into the process of coming to terms with it is a central feature of biographical

work as seen in the presentation activities and the textual forms of background constructions.

### 3.5 Closing-up of background constructions

At the very end of a background construction the narrative constraint of closing the textual forms becomes dominant. Background constructions, although devised of “healing” or self-correction of a discrepancy or of a vagueness of textual rendering at points of implausibility, nevertheless interrupt and cut the cognitive form of the dominant narrative unit, where they occur, and its supra-segmental sequential linking with other narrative units that depicts a specific biographical process structure. After the provocation and commencement of a background construction, the gestalt of the narrative unit and the gestalt of the supra-segmental context of a specific biographical process structure remain unfinished. Remarkably, almost no narrator forgets the unfinished cognitive figure of the specific biographical process structure and the interrupted gestalt of the narrative unit, even if the background construction turns out to be extremely long. This is the impact of the narrative constraint of closing the textual form. Usually the interrupted textual form of the narrative unit and the biographical process structure re-commences exactly at that point where it had been cut. Quite often even the same type of wording is used; sometimes even a “quoting” or repeating of exactly that wording can be observed, which was used exactly before the insertion of the background construction. In our empirical example – just to remind us - the last formulation before the onset of the first order background construction is as follows:

13 and I've been slipped into that and there I've made my two/two and a half years  
 14 ((quieter till+)) I believe it was to that time. made my training for fitter of  
 15 power-plant then +  
 16 I mhm. Ye es  
 17 M that as I said was that what actually everybody did  
 18 here (,).

(page 11, lines 13 to 18)

The first formulation after the closing up of the background construction is:

9 and eh . well the occupational apprenticeship but was really finished in an orderly way  
 ( ) .  
 10 but then already . to that time we were already one Germany right (?)  
 11 Yes  
 12 And that was all . in one (,)

(page 13, lines 9 to 13)

The presentation context of career training and its language are the same in both quotations. The constraint of closing the form forces the narrator to finish both gestalts: the one of the narrative unit and the one of the cognitive figure of the specifically depicted biographical process structure, i.e. the institutional expectation pattern of career line, although it is clear at the same time, that it is just the facade of a trajectory of occupational self-alienation as rendered before. (In the narrator's rendering, this trajectory process went on with unemployment forcibly conditioned and prolonged by the German re-unification process, which destroyed the East German industry of heavy machinery production – a macro-process against which Bernd Funke could have only been able to protect himself by migrating to West Germany. But he did not have the courage to do this, since he was not really identified with what he felt was a superimposed occupation.)

### **3.6 Summary**

Extempore story telling of personal experiences as elicited in an autobiographical narrative interview and analyzed in a structural description exerts the epistemic power of expressing:

- outer and inner experiences
- identity changes of the narrator as story carrier
- fading-out, rationalization and legitimising activities of the narrator as story carrier
- difficult experiences that had been faded out from her or his awareness
- the sequence and the interface of biographical process structures that had an impact on the life history and the identity change of the narrator
- the overall biographical structuring of the life history and the involved identity changes
- the biographical work of the narrator and the involved self-theoretical activities.

Thus, extempore narrative interviewing is a powerful epistemic mechanism for the generation of knowledge. This is due to the constraints of extempore story telling, the orderly macro-presentation procedures of the cognitive figures, the orderly micro-presentation procedures of the narrative units, and the device of background construction, which transfers chaotic experiences that were faded out of awareness before into consciously ordered meta-structures of the logic of the chaotic. Due to the methodological principle of pragmatic refraction, the structural description of textual microstructures of narrative units (including background constructions) reveals the powerful epistemic power of extempore story telling and depicts even non-noticed and/or faded out socio-biographical processes.

## **4. Single Case Analysis of the Funke Interview**

In the following section I would like to show the structural description and analytical abstraction of the Funke interview as an example. This might make it easier to do one's own single case analysis of an autobiographical narrative interview.

### **4.1. A Shortened Version of the Structural Description of the Funke Interview**

One has to differentiate between the analytical description as a research step in single case analysis and the writing up of portrait chapters as the textual presentation of such an analysis. In order to find out what is the case in a life history, as revealed by an autobiographical narrative interview it is pivotal to do the analytical work step of a structural description as part of the research proper for the whole interview. The analytical work step consists of segmenting the whole interview, doing the formal and substantive analysis of each narrative unit following up the sequence of narrative units, collating the outcomes of analysis of topically related or identical narrative units of the main story part of the interview and the questioning parts as well as finding out the supra-segmental markers of biographical process structures.

A special focus should be put on formal phenomena, such as especially vague strings of presentations, symptomatic barriers to work something through in one's presentation and the related attempts at fading-out, a sudden rise of the level of detailing, background constructions and the combination of first order and second order background constructions, as symptoms or self-declarations of forgetting and especially repeated forgetting (respectively delayed sudden remembering), as the mixing up of different event carriers and episodes of high symbolic importance for the narrator and biography incumbent (e.g. an old lady could partially mix up her marriage sixty years ago and her present birthday party, when

she becomes eighty years old; she would like to be in the centre of a family festivity again, although she is almost forgotten by her family), as stubborn presentation of iterated arguments without a productive unfolding of the communicative scheme of argumentation (for doing biographical work – see parts 5 and 6 in the introductory module) and with related restraining of the communicative scheme of narration – this can be observed most dramatically in pre-coda positions –, special attempts to rationalize and legitimize, as well as narrative codas split and separated into their two parts and invaded by elaborate and iterated arguments regarding unsolved biographical problems. Any of these formal phenomena could legitimize an especially close analysis of the narrative units involved.

Another special import must be laid on remarkable substantive phenomena of biographical process structures, as they are obvious in the narrative interview, e.g. in the Funke interview: a cumulative mess of various trajectory experiences (being systematically deprived in his biographical action scheme of becoming a state athlete, being forced into an alienating apprenticeship, being long-term unemployed, having contracted a severe chronic illness, being abandoned by his girlfriend); powerful structural conditions of being hindered to learn and to do biographical work, like the imposition of occupational career lines on individual lives in state socialist societies and its alienating impact on biographical identity; biographical experiences and institutional conditions that fight the trajectory dynamics, e.g. moratoriums situation to find oneself; learning to think about oneself and starting to do biographical work. Here again the researcher finds hindsight, regarding which narrative units it would be especially worthwhile to deepen her or his structural description.

The researcher should then also decide, which parts of the structural description should be written down in an especially careful mode. Normally it is not sensible to write down the whole outcome of the structural description in an elaborate way. The reader and maybe the researcher, too, would then have severe difficulties to find out what are the central relevancies of biographical process structures and their hierarchy in the analyzed life history. Therefore, after having done the structural description as an analytic research step, graphically represented by horizontal lines between the narrative units, by horizontal lines between sub-segments, etc., and as jotted down by short notes characterizing remarkable formal and substantive phenomena in the interview, it must be decided which strings of narrative units should be worked out in the detailed written form and what would be the criteria for selection. The other parts of the interview should be analytically sketched by drawing the lines of biographical process structures using the analytical support by the supra-segmental markers. - Again: it is most important to differentiate between the research step of structural description proper and the writing up of structural descriptions in the form of portrait chapters. In order to document this difference, I will represent my total structural description of the Funke interview by just showing my short notes done while actually doing the research step proper of structural description.

### A. Main story part of the Funke interview

1. Specialized education of the informant, i.e. the boy and adolescent Bernd Funke, in an elite school of sports training is a **biographical cul-de-sac**, because he is not good enough for becoming a professional handball athlete. (1,6-1,18)
2. **Start of the first biographical trajectory of Bernd Funke: being thrown into an occupation that – at least in the beginning - is not connected to personal biographical sense and later on becomes superfluous.** Imposition of a special plumber apprenticeship for becoming a specialist in establishing and fitting heavy industrial machinery on the life of the adolescent Bernd Funke. (1,19-1,34)
3. No opportunity for Bernd Funke to work in this heavy machinery occupation later, since after the German unification the industrial structure of East Germany for the production of heavy machinery broke down (loss of 60 000 work places). (1,35-1,38)

4. Work as plumber for four years; Mr. Funke's personal experience of the every day life impact of the breakdown of GDR industrial structure; Mr. Funke's specialized occupation of establisher and fitter of heavy machinery is becoming more and more obsolete. (1,38-1,44)
5. Service of Mr. Funke in the united German army: He has been put into ordinance service. The army service seems to be a suitable biographical moratorium for the informant: s. o. he properly learns to work in a service occupation (as waiter): he is able to identify with those quasi-occupational service tasks. First transgression of the limits of technical work, and in later life this might prove to become important for his retraining as office worker. - On the other hand, the army service of Mr. Funke seems to be connected to a loss of his biographical time and to somewhat losing control over his athletic body: He gets fat. (1,44-1,53)
6. Mr. Funke's experience of occupational disorientation and long-term unemployment. Small jobs, partially in the plumbing occupation. (2,1-2,12)
7. Chance of an occupational comeback, i.e. to work again in metal construction. By chance and personal connections Mr. Funke finds work in a small firm for metal construction; Mr. Funke's expectation of the consolidation of his life situation. However, the informant gives the following - almost disguised - two qualifications: he says that he slid ("reingerutscht") into the position, and the firm was just some sort of small hut or shackle (a "Butze"). (2,12-2,16)
8. **Eclipse of Mr. Funke's first trajectory of having learnt a superfluous, an obsolete occupation.** Breakdown of expectation: the small firm of metal construction doesn't pay his salary. **Start of the second trajectory of becoming socially isolated and losing significant others; it might also be seen as a transformation of the first trajectory (somebody who is in permanent material difficulties and doesn't find a stance to it, tends to lose his life partner and his or her friends).** His girlfriend breaks away from him. **Start of the third biographical trajectory of suffering from a severe chronic disease.** Bernd Funke gets a permanent pain in his back connected to his spine. He is not able anymore to work in his plumbing occupation. Change of corporeal identity and personal attitude to his body again: he gets extremely slim. (2,16-2,29)
9. After a while an MD finds out that he contracted Morbus Bechterev: a stiffening of the spine by overproduction of bone material. (Until today this chronic illness cannot be healed, but its trajectory course can be slowed down.) Realization that he has lost the capacity to do manual work. Alienation from one's own biographical identity. (2,30-2,44)
10. Ending of Mr. Funke's contract with the small metal construction firm that doesn't pay his salary. Mr. Funke is physically disabled and cannot continue the work in his learnt occupation. **Transformation of the first trajectory:** Amassing of debts, since he did not get any salary payments from the small metal construction firm. Systematic trap through debts and danger of losing his flat, of becoming homeless. (2,44-3,11)
11. **Mr. Funke experiences the deepest, biographically most difficult stage of the unfolding of the three connected trajectories of suffering (being systematically unemployed; losing one's social and love relationship; suffering a severe disease):** breakdown of every day life organization. He formulates: "I was deep down" ("Da war ich eigentlich sehr weit unten."). And he formulates: "There are many things, which came together." **Additional transformation of trajectory:** Bernd Funke becomes an alcoholic. (3,11-3,23)
12. **Intervention activities of controlling the trajectory dynamics in the disastrous life situation of Bernd Funke:** Help ("first aid") of mother and grandparents. Stepping-in of the health insurance company: Mr. Funke can spend five weeks in a spa. There he gets the clarification and confirmation of the diagnosis of his disease: Morbus Bechterev. **Situation of biographical moratorium:** first time for Mr. Funke of getting some distance from all the experiences of suffering that had an impact on him for such a long time. (3,23-3,31)
13. **Intervention and getting processed by the labour exchange administration.** After some interrogation and testing the labour exchange bureau raises the idea that Bernd Funke could be re-schooled and retrained, i.e. rehabilitated as an industrial business clerk or administrative office worker. The informant assesses that the psycho-social "case study" of the labour exchange bureau on him was not very circumspect and systematic. The decision of the labour exchange bureau to offer a re-schooling and retraining for the occupation of business clerk to Mr. Funke seems to not have been informed by personal ideas and wishes of Mr. Funke; the decision of the labour exchange bureau might have been done in a quite haphazard way. - The tests of the labour exchange bureau administered on Mr. Funke show that he needs a special preparation for the upcoming apprenticeship in a vocational training school. (3,31-5,3)
14. Rehabilitative re-schooling and retraining of Mr. Funke. The subjects are: German and English language, budget/accounting, and mathematics. Contrast set of the cleavage between young and old students in class; the danger felt by Bernd Funke of getting de-motivated by the discouraged and weary older students in class. But Mr. Funke understands the deeper social or theatrical meaning of this

contrast set and positions himself as young and interested. He re-activates his old biographical capacity of intensive identification with the occupational tasks put in front of him. **He does the biographical work of defining his present life situation:** that it is a chance for a new biographical and material beginning. Mr. Funke realises that there are no material, physical, social and biographical resources left for his going on as he did before or for an additional other alternative course of occupational development than the one that was offered to him already. (5,4-6,17)

15. **Emotional realization that the dynamics of the trajectory development are arrested:** For Mr. Funke life becomes beautiful again. Mr. Funke's biographical plan of, and focussing on, his successful finishing of the rehabilitative education and training in the vocational training centre. **Change of biographical process structures: (a) undergoing an educational career and (b) intentional biographical action scheme of finishing the educational career course.** There is an **important significant other** in the training centre: social worker Mrs. Brühl, who counsels and helps individually. She conveys biographical strength to Mr. Funke; she teaches him that he counts personally and biographically. Especially because of her personal caring Mr. Funke can overcome his devastating feelings of total loneliness and of total personal incapability. Mrs. Brühl helps him to develop orientations for his own biographical future. She teaches him to do the biographical work of creatively and realistically shaping one's own future. She also trains him to become circumspect regarding the provisions for everyday life and biographically pivotal situations (e.g. job interviews). And, finally, she teaches him to authentically present himself in biographically decisive situations. Looking to all of these deep learning and training experiences there might even be some bit of a **metamorphosis experience** in this stage of Mr. Funke's life – a metamorphosis experience that is defined by the more or less non-organizable dynamics of creative identity change. (6,17-6,42)
16. It is a very good firm that takes Mr. Funke in as an apprentice: the convention centre hall of the city he lives in. In this firm there are many different sorts and features of occupational work. Mr. Funke gets **many opportunities to learn anew. Background construction (7,14-7,33) which expresses the shock of first beginning** as apprentice: Mr. Funke's experiencing the (for him) totally strange and different work discipline of service administration and the involved paper work, and he has to accept the admonitions of the quite stern but righteous female boss. In the vocational school he has to attend on a steady basis Mr. Funke gets social encouragement by his peers who are in the same or in a comparable situation of rehabilitation. (6,42-7,40)
17. Mr. Funke now works in a permanent position of public administration (in the convention centre hall). In addition, he follows up a part time (evening hours) study of business administration; **biographical auspices of getting further ahead in his occupational career.** (7,40-7,52)
18. **Pre-coda commentary** with positive overall biographical evaluation and balancing: "Now I am a happy man. I am content, except that there might be too much work. It virtually cannot get better." (8,1-8,14)
19. **Coda** with cautious, very modest commentary on the kind of narrative presentation the informant did accomplish: "I hope that you wanted to hear this type of biographical rendering." (8,15-8,20)

## B. Answers of the Informant to Narrative and Descriptive Questioning

The questioning activity of the interviewer is immediately connected to the finishing of the coda: **start of the second half of the autobiographical narrative interview**, i.e. the interview section for raising immanent and non-immanent narrative, descriptive and argumentative questions, in order to make the autobiographical rendering of the main story line more detailed. (8,20-23,41)

20. The informant tells about his personal experiences with the GDR selection system of getting chosen for the various fields of competitive elite sports; at least in his case it functioned like an illusionary, treacherous entrapment device. ("The door of the classroom went open: "We support the development of sports." – They don't say: "We would like to support your personal development in sports.") Then the informant talks about his own intake into this elite training and control system and to attending an elite sports „grammar school“. There he specializes in handball sports. (8,20-9,23)
21. The whole school life of the sports grammar school is adapted to the state institutionalised training schedule. The individual biographical counterpart of this is Mr. Funke's super-focusing on his handball training and general sports training; he gets into some sort of addiction from sports. (9,24-10,10)
22. Mr. Funke's great expectation - according to the institutionally promised and expected career line - of becoming a handball professional (or, to what was the counterpart to this in the GDR sports system: of becoming a state actor in sports – comparable to a state writer, state artist or state scientist, who maximises the reputation of the GDR). (10,10-10,30)
23. Getting thrown out of the specialized sports school. Mr. Funke experiences his elimination from the elite sports school like a **stroke of lightning** smashing down on him. **Start of the first trajectory** of being put into an alienating occupation that is not connected to any biographical sense making activities of Mr.

Funke as well as of the professionals in the labour exchange bureau or in the apprenticeship education. No traces of institutional support for overcoming Mr. Funke's suffering of having lost one's own biographical orientation. No traces of biographical work of young Bernd Funke himself towards re-orientation of his future life and interpretation of his past life history. Mr. Funke has been put into an apprenticeship that was just available. No traces of educational considerations in the informant's depiction of the exclusion decision and the respective activities of his teachers in the elite sports school. (This might not have been extraordinary, since the GDR system of being selected for, and placed in, the occupational system was one of generalized top-down planning just taking into account the requirements of the "societal macro-household" of occupational demands, and not listening to any types of biographical considerations of the involved and afflicted individuals.) Mr. Funke becomes an apprentice for the occupation of placing and fitting heavy machinery (a technically advanced and specialised version of the plumber occupation). Bernd Funke's trajectory experience of being institutionally processed without taking into regard one's own personal considerations: alienation from one's biographical identity. (10,30-11,12)

24. The apprenticeship forces Mr. Funke into a severe trajectory situation: he feels having an empty head, being numb, undergoing a condition of severe disorientation. **First order** (11,20-14,8) **and second order** (12,16-13,37) **background construction**: every expectation of a biographical escape from the **trajectory trap of having been forced and introduced into the wrong occupation** seems to be far away. This is an extremely hurting experience that Bernd Funke *then*, in that former life situation, and *now*, as present narrator and interview partner, attempts to **fade out of his awareness**. (Exactly this is what the utterance "empty head" means.) Mr. Funke's dim, remote contemplation over a way out: of becoming a non-commissioned officer in the East German army; this should later on - that is the vague expectation of Mr. Funke - be followed by a career in the military branch of the GDR central police task force ("Bereitschaftspolizei"). Mr. Funke finishes his apprenticeship. At the same time: breakdown of the East German state, transformation of the East German society and unification of the two German states. Through these macro-changes of social structure the occupation of establishing and fitting heavy machinery becomes superfluous for the East German economy. Loss of 60 000 occupational positions in the heavy machinery industry in East Germany, especially in that area of the country, where the informant lives in. In addition, the East German occupation of machine fitter and establisher as such doesn't seem to be totally acceptable in West Germany. **Loss of the red thread of narrative presentation** (14,13): it is difficult for the informant to recollect and re-live this extremely difficult phase of his trajectory of occupational alienation and misplacement. (11,12-14,13)
25. Contemplating the possible biographical alternatives in the present interview retrospect – but not in the narrated former actual situation -: Mr. Funke should have gone to West Germany, but instead, after finishing the apprenticeship, he stays in the firm of his vocational training on a contract without any pay. (14,14-15,4)
26. Mr. Funke experiences the **collective trajectory of partial dismantling of the industrial structure** of East Germany; loss of occupational positions and opportunities of heavy industry in East Germany on a large scale. Mr. Funke's witnesses the societal and social chaos of the breakdown of a society's socio-structural formation and its economic sub-structure. He is forced to do superfluous occupational work ("to collect dirt and to shovel the sand from one hip to the other"). (15,4-15,50)
27. Mr. Funke works as a plumber without any pay and contract. Mr. Funke lives in the state of **unstable equilibrium** of the first trajectory of being trapped within a superfluous occupation and being alienated by it in his personal identity structure. (15,50-16,37)
28. **Intersection of the occupational trajectory and the newly appearing illness trajectory**. Mutual reinforcement of two or even multiple trajectory courses. **Mr. Funke's eclipse of his multi-faceted personal trajectory experience** of being systematically unemployed; of being severely ill; of being socially isolated and totally alone; as well as of being in a debt trap. ("And suddenly all of that went downhill. This really went deeply under point zero." – The last quotation is a **supra-segmental narrative marker of trajectory experience**. – 16,50/51) (16,38-17,3)
29. Mr. Funke quits his job as plumber: from his former boss he has to get reimbursed by 3 000 Euros (6000 Marks), which he never receives. (He didn't work under a formal contract.) The labour exchange office discourages him to sue the firm. ("They say: „You cannot get anything from such a firm that has many unpaid creditors.“"). The labour exchange office gives no emotional support regarding the devastating feeling of having been cheated by his boss he trusted in and having been abandoned by everybody. (17,3-18,31)
30. Suddenly struck down by **the illness trajectory**: Morbus Bechterev. His quitting of all types of sports exercises, games and competitions personally means for Mr. Funke: **loss of his sports friends, who are biographically very important peers**. (18,31-19,9)

31. **Psycho-bodily transformation of the combined dynamics of two or more trajectories of Mr. Funke** into a severe state of **alcoholism**. Bernd Funke did not understand what happened to him (multi-problem trajectory, and **fading out** of the suffering from one's own awareness). (19,10-20,6)
32. **The health insurance company and the labour exchange office intervene:**
- Mr. Funke's biographical moratorium in a spa.
  - Sitting in the classroom of the vocational training centre is seen by Mr. Funke as the opportunity to start a new life. ("It was like drawing a closing line to former life and now beginning a new life.")
  - Bernd Funke is positioned anew within the co-ordinate system of the social structure. **Background construction** (20,45-21,43): reflection of not having been sensibly and fairly positioned in society at all before the start of this new period of life.
  - Being psychologically tested.
  - Getting money for living on a stable base. Formation of the biographical action scheme of becoming a business clerk – as suggested by the labour exchange office. (Some features of accidental offer and decision: during this period of societal transformation in East Germany administratively organised schematic opportunities of job training were available, such as for the position of a business clerk. - But contrary to the lack of biographical counselling, the labour exchange office does take into consideration the bodily condition of Mr. Funke, e. g., that he would not be able anymore to be trained and to work in a manual occupation with lots of body movements such as, e.g., land surveyor – an occupation, which he did wish to enter quite a bit.) (20,7-22,30)
33. Bernd Funke attends two job interviews; he gives an **authentic biographical presentation**. (22,30-23,18)
34. Shock of the first days in the new occupational position: doing secretarial paper work, which in his organizational logic is totally strange to Mr. Funke. But Mr. Funke is fascinated by the complexity of the various work lines of the multi-feature firm "Convention Centre Hall". And he is being "adopted" by the middle-aged women of the work department he is assigned to. (23,19-23,41)

### C. Replies of the Informant to Argumentative Questioning

The interviewer gives a general commentary on the accidental nature of Mr. Funke's second occupational career line. This puts the re-learning achievement of Mr. Funke and the felicitousness of his second biographical beginning into question. The general commentary of the interviewer elicits general argumentative assessments of the informant. He now adopts the communicative scheme of argumentation (23,41-28,16)

35. Interviewer-introduced discussion of the accidental nature of the circumstances through which Mr. Funke got the offer to be trained as business clerk. **But this accidental decision did and still does make biographical sense** to Mr. Funke: it was his straw to grip under the combined impact of the severe occupational and illness trajectories (**biographical sense making practices**). After a short while Mr. Funke is able to transform this accidental decision into a professional identification. He is fascinated by the complexity of the multi-feature firm he is accepted to learn in. The intensive identification with his new work situation is based on the **biographical work** that Mr. Funke did in-between (especially supported by the professional counsellor Mrs. Brühl in the vocational rehabilitation centre). - **Experience of** being placed or even **positioned in the structure of social relations** in the firm: he gets "adopted" as a "son" by the middle-aged women of the firm. – In doing his biographical work– and he does this even in the actual interview situation - , Mr. Funke reaches at the final recovery state of working-through his trajectory experiences: he becomes self-aware of having matured. He shows understanding and compassion with the much younger female apprentice, who gets into difficulties in the firm. - Some features of **metamorphosis**: for the informant it is fun to work; self-awareness of his maturation; he is able to focus on every important feature of his new work situation, and he is astonished that he is able to handle it easily. (23,41-26,11)
36. Self-explanation of the informant why he underwent an intensive biographical maturation: in his perspective, most pivotal for this is his biographical caretaker or even significant other Mrs. Brühl. What she does for her client is:
- She trains him in elementary organisational culture.
  - She counsels him how to become aware of his own personal strengths and identity features.
  - She demonstrates circumspection as a role model, and, in addition, she even teaches circumspection in a direct educational way.

- She educates her client how to present himself as applicant: a good application must be authentic and presented in a biographical language: E.g. during the job interview one should say something like: „I have set out to search for a new orientation in life“.
- She provides useful paraphernalia for her client’s application situations (e.g. transparent envelopes for the application documents).
- For her client she checks the possibility and the adequacy of his placement in two firms under consideration.
- She gives biographical encouragement to her client.
- She explains teaching materials of the vocational school Mr. Funke did not understand; and she prepares him for his final examination of his apprenticeship.
- Very important also is: Mrs. Brühl gives Mr. Funke the feeling to be cared for.
- The general biographical insight that the trajectory incumbent himself brings into the rehabilitative educational situation of the vocational training centre is as follows: He knows that he has to move biographically after having undergone several complex biographical trajectories and/or their transformations: that of occupational misplacement, that of a severe chronic disease, that of getting socially isolated and that of getting into the debt trap. Of course, this insight of her client makes the counselling work of Mrs. Brühl much easier.  
(26,12-28,16)

#### **4.2 First sub-step of analytical abstraction: Outlining the overall biographical structuring**

The reconstructed “gestalt” of the overall biographical structuring (Riemann 1987; Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984; Perleberg, Schütze, Heine 2006) is the outcome of the following three procedures:

- (a) Looking at the sequential order and the supra-segmental markers of the narrative units of the main story line and delineating the start, the evolvement and the ending of biographical process structures, their sequential combination and their competition and/or mutual support during the same biographical period;
- (b) looking at the more detailed renderings of the personally painful and shameful experiential contexts as well as the subliminal creative experiences, as dealt with in the questioning parts of the interview;
- (c) Looking at the argumentative commentary activities of the main story line as they are interpretatively assessing, explaining, legitimating and/or evaluating the experiences of biographical process structures, their sequential combination and their actual mutual impact (competition, support, substitution, etc.).

The overall biographical structuring of the life history of Mr. Funke can now be outlined in terms of the following sequence of biographical process structures and their internal phases:

1. Bernd Funke embarks on a career as an elite student of competitive sports in an elite sports gymnasium in order to become a state athlete in the GDR sports system; the latter is a vague, but not unreasonable biographical action scheme.
2. The career auspices of Bernd Funke are destroyed when he is in the tenth grade (16 years of age), since after several years of training and studying in the elite sports gymnasium his trainers and teachers suddenly see his achievements in competitive athletic activities by as insufficient for the biographical action scheme to become a professional state athlete. The biographical career scheme and the related biographical action scheme of becoming a state athlete have finally turned into a dead end lane and biographical trap.
3. This conditions Bernd Funke’s start of a self-alienating trajectory of being processed by a superimposed vocational training that is not grounded in any practice of biographical sense making. There is a protracted evolvement of this occupational trajectory experience: Bernd Funke is processed in a self-estranging vocational training and, on

top of this, he has to endure an additional (biographical trajectory) trap quality of this vocational training, i.e. being driven into long-term unemployment after the breakdown of the GDR heavy machinery industry.

4. After becoming unemployed, respectively after having been in a pseudo-occupational state of working without pay, the self-alienating occupational trajectory becomes dynamic. There are typical symptoms of the dynamisation of an alienating occupational and unemployment trajectory and its realisation in the case of Mr. Funke: experiencing an “empty head” and feeling undermined in his own personal identity structure, losing his important social relationships (Bernd Funke’s girl friend splits away from him), an incremental building up of a debt trap; as well as becoming an alcoholic.
5. There is a sudden first precipitation and a later overwhelming evolvement of a trajectory of severe chronic illness (Morbus Bechterev). Mr. Funke is not able to practice sports anymore; this is connected to a sudden and total loss of his peers and his pivotal social relationships in the field of sports. The illness trajectory now intersects with the alienating occupational and unemployment trajectory and their ensuing transformations. Bernd Funke must endure the cumulative mess of the interface of several trajectories and/or of their transformations that he is afflicted and labouring with. A breakdown of his action capacity to organise his every-day life follows. This is conditioned especially through the permanent drinking of alcohol as a fading-out practice as well as through the nagging and fatiguing danger of imminent eviction from his apartment and, thus, the risk of becoming a homeless person.
6. Bernd Funke’s family and his health insurance company intervene, and they immediately enact a decisive rescue action scheme: to circumvent the eviction as well as to curb the rapid downward move of the trajectory or trajectory transformation of severe alcoholism, with its imminent danger of a total orientation breakdown.
7. Bernd Funke is offered a decisive biographical moratorium in a health spa to the extent that it conditions an arresting or “freezing” of the multiple trajectory dynamics and of the involved trajectory transformation dynamics (e.g. to become economically insolvent, progressively isolated, a notorious alcoholic, etc).
8. Bernd Funke undergoes a flexible institutional retraining program by a public avantgarde Vocational Retraining Agency (an occupational retraining, assistance and mediating agency) as mediated and offered by the state official labour exchange organisation. In this vocational retraining are built-in structural chances for biographical reconsideration, for biographical learning and for biographical work of all sorts as well as for new biographical starts and for the built-up of new biographical action schemes. The institutional retraining program offers moratorium time to its client for new inner developments. For the professional counsellor, this entails the following work tasks: providing an overall school educational arrangement focused on the client’s learning new features of the occupational world and on self-encouragement as a dependable and capable learner; establishing self-reflective learning situations of personal training in a coach-client relationship; giving leeway for the client’s fighting and overcoming his or her relapses into old trajectory reactions and into the involved personal difficulties; teaching the client to exert dynamic control on biographical inertia (of being fatigued); as well as providing for several conditions of limited procedural “timeout” in order to allow for the client’s additional inner time of personal change and growth;
9. During the course of his retraining program the personal identification of Mr. Funke develops with this chance that suddenly appeared for a new learning and retraining career as apprentice. Mr. Funke enacts the biographical action scheme of winning a new vocational identity and getting a promising occupational position; he learns to do biographical work by looking at his own personal weaknesses and mistakes, especially at his systematic vulnerability dispositions, as having been fatal in the past;

10. Mr. Funke's becomes a successful initiate within his newly acquired occupational world. He makes new experiences in the field of social relationships, he learns work ethics, and he acquires creativity in his occupational dealings. He is especially doing more intensive and more reflective biographical work – now partially focused on the future (biographical action scheme of being a part time student of business administration); some features of biographical metamorphosis are observable from his change from the world of manual labour to the world of white collar work, especially secretarial paper work and management work.

To the reconstruction of overall biographical structuring also belongs the sub-step of analysing the self-theoretical insights and rationalisations of the informant, as realized through argumentative strings of text (stemming from the communicative scheme of argumentation). In the general lay-out of autobiographical narrative interviews there are the following features for self-theorizing and argumentation:

- Systematic textual positions for self-theoretical activities (Schütze 1987) in the autobiographical narrative interview: e. g., commentaries to narrative presentations of the peak phase, turning point and eclipse experiences of biographical process structures as well as pre-coda re-evaluations of one's own history and present life situation, etc.;
- Self-theoretical insights and shortcomings of the informant as biography incumbent: e.g. the insight into the trap situation of a vocational training or an occupational situation, on the one hand, and the delusion to be always a competent analyst of one's own difficulties, on the other. To take the example of Mr. Funke: he understands to some extent the self-alienating character of his first apprenticeship of becoming a heavy machinery plumber, on the one hand, but he fades out of his awareness his notorious lack of biographical planning regarding any work position offered to him, on the other: he doesn't ask himself if these offers of a new occupational position or training program fit his personal identity, he always shows the attitude of automatic acceptance and identification with such positions, and he develops the inadequate self-theory that his notorious identification with new job offers would always be just a virtue and personal strength. Bernd Funke's belief that his attitude and capacity to personally identify with every required or even superimposed institutional task and his aptitude to carry it through would be a moral virtue and personal strength, is in fact one of the central conditions for his undergoing a protracted trajectory course of occupational self-alienation, for he accepts the unloved plumber apprenticeship and remains in it without any protest. For example, he states near the end of his interview:

50 but actually that was always like that (-).  
 51 I made every effort everywhere I liked to do everything then (,).  
 52 in my other fields of work too at that time (-). in the  
 53 steal construction or  
 1 as a plumber (-) . ehm . that was always a fulfilment for me (,).  
 4 But when it was over with that it was said then "so that's it (,) from (-) .  
 now on 5 it's done with". then a new thing came up (-) . you got to (...)  
 again

(page 25, line 50 to page 26, line 5).

Self-theoretical activities can be central constituents of biographical work, on the one hand, and they can be central means to hinder biographical work, on the other. Some of the self-theories are self-produced ("authentic") theories, and some of them are borrowed theoretical explanations and orientations as handed over by professionals and lay people (especially peers); the borrowed theories could cause a theoretical loss of authenticity, if they would not fit the biographical experiences of the informant. The most important

methodological step in order to find out about the biographical work function and the several delusional, legitimating and rationalizing functions of self-theoretical and argumentative textual strings is their pragmatic refraction or contextualizing them with the socio-biographical processes as rendered by the narrative units and their sequences.

### 4.3 Procedures and Topics of Analytical Abstraction

The research activities of (a) reconstructing the sequence and interface of biographical process structures as the first sub-step of the overall biographical structuring and of (b) dealing with the argumentative (self-theoretical and rationalising) presentation activities of the informant as the second sub-task of the reconstruction of the overall biographical structuring are integral parts of the epistemic realm of analytical abstraction already. In addition, there are the case specific and universal theoretical insights of the researcher into the process mechanisms and social frames of the life history of the informant. On the one hand, the insights into biographical process mechanisms and social frames are partially the final result from all the research steps done up to now on the single interview (or case). On the other hand, the insights partially have to be produced by two specific additional research procedures.

(1) **Firstly** one should ask what are the most important specific and universal **features and process mechanisms of the life history** under study in its special relationship to the rehabilitation situation – as empirically based on the analytical procedures for the study of single interviews that were done already. In the case of Mr. Funke one could list the following features:

- (a) Not having learnt to do biographical work – especially in regard to choosing a biographically adequate vocation.

In order to get a deeper insight here, it is helpful to consider in some bit more detail (than in section 1 of the first part of this module), what biographical work (Corbin and Strauss 1988: chapter 4 and 5) is. Just to list its most important features:

- ❖ to see yourself as a developing entity that matters
- ❖ to realize that it makes a big difference whether you focus on that development or not: that you try to support it, if it is benign, or to stop it, if it is detrimental
- ❖ to understand that, at the beginning, you don't really know what is the quality and the dynamics of the unfolding of that development: therefore you have to find out about it
- ❖ to acknowledge, that the task to find out basically means to tell your life history: by autobiographical story telling you will express to yourself, what are possible overarching features of your life; to understand that it is important to see the self-historical shape of your biography
- ❖ to delineate the nature of these overarching features of life:
  - autobiographical self-thematizations of your life history as a whole: especially far-reaching plans and expectations as well as severe disappointments and experiences of having been personally hurt)
  - resources of sense making: delineating the self-historical gestalt of your life and identity development as well as realizing the alternative ways of interpreting and following up its self-historical shape
  - potentials of getting distracted from that self-historical shape and of getting personally hurt (e. g. by the breakdown of favourable social and societal conditions, by discrepancies and disappointments in significant social relationships, by failures of following up your own life expectations or those of others referring to you, by getting disoriented through unrealistic, personally unfitting, trap-like competing life orientations, etc.)
  - basic positions, what life in general and especially your own is all about; as well as the relevancies and responsibilities of those basic positions
  - the sequence and competition of biographical process structures of biographical action schemes, of trajectories of suffering, of institutional expectation patterns, especially careers, and of biographical metamorphosis developments: how to follow up and to work on (or fight) each of

- their specific dynamics and to realize their factual and potential interconnections in order that you can find a realistic overall shape of biography
- the connectedness with, and distance from, requirements of important collectivities, cultures as well as significant social relationships of your life; the involvement in problems of cultural marginality/hybridity and in discrepancies within and between central social relationships
  - social relationships, media, social words as well as cultural styles that enable you – or at least to assist you - in order to follow up the overall shape of biography: (i.e. your autobiographical self thematizations)
- ❖ to deal in a circumspect way with your autobiographical knowledge used up to the present; this knowledge consists of:
- elementary classifications and assumptions: e.g. that you would not belong to the breed of cultured persons, who would be entitled and intelligent enough to embark on programmes of higher education, in order to get a position in a white collar vocation, i.e. that you would just have the capacities of your own body at your disposal and not so much those of your brain in order to fulfil the requirements of your occupational work (here the powerful contrast set of social categories for orientation is one of “primitive classification” in the sense of Durkheim and Mauss (1903): manual work vs. non-manual work or, to put it in a Marxian language, hand work vs. brain work)
  - elementary assumptions regarding adopted responsibilities towards collectivities you would belong to (e.g. to sacrifice yourself for your family; to obey any type of institutional expectation pattern of society, since the present society as you see it embodies the essential, alternative-less order of your world; to stand for the causes of your nation whatever they might be; etc.)
  - adopted professional explanation theories regarding your personal difficulties and potentials, that might fit or not
  - delusional self-theories you have developed in order to explain difficulties and shortcomings in your life live up to now
  - assumption about your own abilities and disabilities regarding learning, understanding, looking-through, harnessing personal energy, making use of your own body, etc.
37. This lack of the ability to do biographical work is biographically conditioned by the following circumstances:
- by the socialisation into a state management system of administered allocation and imposition of occupational career tracks – a system which virtually ignores personal inclinations, wishes, choices;
  - by the absence of those significant others and biographical care takers who would teach the young person, that the personal choice of one’s own occupation is biographically important, since occupational work is one of the most important conditions for self realisation; instead, especially in lower class life situations occupational work is just seen as the opportunity to earn one’s material subsistence and not as an institutional structure for personal cultivation and self-realisation; as well as
  - by the experience of the destruction of the occupational opportunity structure of the GDR during the rapid societal transformation process after the eclipse of the societal formation of the GDR; the ensuing systematic discouragement process could force individuals to assume that a personal occupational career line with strenuous vocational training and retraining as well as biographical planning and re-evaluation would be senseless, since it could again be suddenly destroyed by the unexpected historical occurrence of new powerful societal conditions. (Regarding the case of the GDR transformation this conclusion would nevertheless partially be a fallacy: the *institutional* structure of the vocational system of the GDR society basically remained valid during and after the transformation, since it was widely identical with the West German institutional structure of occupations. However, the occupational *opportunity structure within the labour market* was partially annihilated.)

38. The rehabilitation counsellor Mrs. Brühl intuitively understands the importance of letting Mr. Funke learn biographical work. Most important preconditions for learning biographical work are (and Mrs. Brühl provides for them):
- The existence of a biographical care taker who teaches the afflicted person that she or he is personally important and counts; the afflicted person has to gain identity strength;
  - The care taker's showing of personal solidarity and supportiveness towards the attempts of the afflicted person to overcome her or his predicament;
  - The provision for a moratorium and learning situations of experiencing the world and oneself anew – moratorium and learning situations allow the afflicted person some regressive relapses without serious existential consequences into her or his former difficulties, in order to re-experience and to re-evaluate what happened, which induces the client to work through these experiences, i.e. to do biographical work.
39. Only after having learned how to do biographical work Mr. Funke is capable of starting or taking over a biographical action scheme of becoming socialised into a new vocation.
- (2) **Secondly**, one should develop a **generalised grid structure** of analytical categories regarding the specific predicament of the rehabilitation situation. Important categories of this grid structure are:
- (a) the kind of trajectories and their combinations – or other biographical processes – which result in severe situations of unemployment and/or of chronic illness and the connected inabilities to perform certain types of work, both connected with psychosomatic and psychiatric phenomena of suffering. (In the case of Mr. Funke's life history, these trajectories and their transformations are: the educational trap of the elite sports school; the self-alienating occupational training; the loss of work through the transformation process; the severe illness and the sudden inability of Mr. Funke to do sports and to participate in a leisure-time community, which was biographically very important for him; Mr. Funke's loss of intimate social relationships; his debts trap; the cumulative mess through the intersection and dynamisation of trajectories and the ensuing transformation of them into severe alcoholism.)
  - (b) the kind of biographical preconditions for being hindered to learn to do biographical work (in the case of the life history of Mr. Funke: administrative system of job selection and its imposition on the individual; lack of understanding of the biographical sense of vocational training and doing one's occupational work as means for self-realisation; lack of significant others and biographical care takers for supporting the young person to choose a biographically appropriate vocation and - later on – for supporting the afflicted person to work on her or his occupational difficulties and their emotional implications; being discouraged to follow up an occupational career line by the destruction of the opportunity structure of the East German labour market);
  - (c) necessary supportive conditions for successful rehabilitation (in the case of Mr. Funke's life history: professional providing for an institutional moratorium and learning situation as well as providing for an institutional leeway regarding possible relapses into trajectory difficulties within the retraining and re-socialisation process and regarding their working-through; self-establishment of the rehabilitation counsellor as biographical care taker of the client who lets the client learn that he or she counts individually and personally; training relationship; focus of the counsellor on the client's learning of biographical work);
  - (d) necessary capabilities of the rehabilitation counsellor to do biographical and organisational counselling;

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- understanding the biographical process structures and overall biographical structuring of the life history of the client,
  - understanding the biographical situation of the client here and now,
  - understanding the biographical potentials of the client of being vulnerable in his identity structure,
  - understanding the biographical basic stances of the client regarding his or her occupational life,
  - understanding the biographical resources of the client for the required personal change,
  - understanding the self-theoretical work of the client as part of his or her productive biographical work or as part of his or her self-delusional rationalisation, legitimising and fading out,
  - encouraging the client to do biographical work in a generalised moratorium and learning situation, as well as
  - drawing the client into a training situation of becoming sensitive, circumspect, assertive, systematic and persevering in doing planning, ordering and assessment work regarding biographical organisation as well as mundane local enactments.
- (e) Potentials for mistakes at work of the counsellor in the counselling process:
- not realising the biographical key symbols of the life history of the client,
  - not realising the hidden, disguised, faded-out biographical background experiences of the client,
  - superimposing on the client his or her initial understanding of the pivotal features of the life history of the client and the difficulties of her or his trajectory predicament, as well as the shortcomings in her or his biographical work – thereby neglecting the point of view and personal interpretation of the client.
- (f) Possible special difficulties in the biographical counselling process:
- the biographical work of the client could remain systematically missing,
  - the client might not have the inner energy and/or the situational conditions for the enactment of a biographical action scheme;
  - there could be ambivalent attitudes of the client regarding the rehabilitation process and the biographical work of identity change involved in it, and/or
  - there could be detrimental biographical basic positions of the client regarding the retraining and counselling process of rehabilitation – e.g. mistrust;
  - favourable biographical basic stances in one's life situation could turn detrimental in others (e.g., Mr. Funke's attitude of unconditioned identification with any type of occupational career offer put in front of him was helpful for moving from manual work to office paperwork, but was infelicitous in other occupational situations, for example in the situation of almost automatically accepting the offered work position in the small metal work company without a formal contract. The over-identification with any type of work opportunities could hinder Mr. Funke to develop his own red thread of a personal biographical career line and might retard him to start a critical reflection and biographical working-through of occupational trap situations).

## **5. A short note on the further research steps: contrastive comparison and developing a theoretical model**

Having reached the stage of analytical abstraction for at least two cases (however, it is not necessary that these cases have been written up as portrait chapters already; it could moreover be possible that other cases come up later that represent the theoretical variation much better), the researcher has to empirically check the overall theoretical variation of the biographical and/or social phenomena under study and to analytically check their

contrastive features. This is the research step of contrastive comparison. The check of the overall theoretical variation becomes possible when the researcher has been sensitized for the general dimensions of biographical and collective process structures in the topical field under study by the close single case analysis of more than one autobiographical narrative interview. She or he then starts to imagine possible variations of case developments in terms of biographical and/or social processes and search for them in the empirical field under study. This will possibly lead to contacts with new informants and to conducting new autobiographical narrative interviews. In an ideal research process, this would end up with the complete theoretical saturation of the selection process regarding new cases to be collected and studied. In such an ideal state of research any additional approach to a new case wouldn't generate new theoretical insights anymore. Of course, in many situations of counselling-connected case analysis and even praxis-oriented scientific research there will not be the time and work resources to carry through the epistemic process of theoretical comparison and search for saturation to its complete end. Nevertheless, this process will lead to a considerably differentiated and integrated overview over the theoretical dimensions of the biographical and collective processes involved in the topical field under study.

After the collection and study of at least two single cases the researcher must, broadly speaking, compare the fundamentally general, the differentiating typological and the remarkably distinctive features of the first case, which she or he has studied, with the fundamentally general, the differentiating typological and the remarkably distinctive features of other cases. (Of course, the qualifications of the researcher, what should be envisioned as general, alternative or distinct, can only be understood as preliminary.) The researcher has to take into account, that very often the remarkably distinct phenomenon reveals underlying general features, as compared with the distinct traits of other cases. The general task of contrastive comparison in a biography-analytical research, then, is to identify and to sharpen the contours of the overall structural processes of biography and collective processes that have been analysed within the single cases of separate interviews as nuclei for the generation of theoretical models.

There are two different general strategies of contrastive comparison: following up the line of the comparison of cases that would contrast maximally and the line of comparison of those that would contrast minimally. The first strategy of maximal contrasting would be conducted in order to generate insights into as many new and different category dimensions as possible. This is the epistemic strategy to rapidly explore and map a new field under study. The second strategy aims at the meticulous analysis of the workings of a biographical process structure or of the function of a social frame already identified and selected for a closer theoretical study. This epistemic strategy would be oriented towards the theoretical spelling out of process mechanisms of biographical or social developments or "unfoldings" that seem to be especially promising in terms of theoretical insight. The second strategy can only be accomplished through the close point-to-point comparison of certain aspects and stages of corresponding empirical cases. The sub-step of close point-to-point comparison of corresponding cases immediately leads to the built-up of partial regions of an integrated theoretical model that later will cover the whole theoretical variation within the topical field under study. (And for finding out about its architecture, the comparison strategy of maximal contrasting is important again.)

The research step of contrastive comparison of autobiographical narrative interviews with clients of occupational rehabilitation, then, could start with the following considerations, if we would take as first case the Funke interview:

- There must be a comparison of the Funke interview with other German interviews in which the rehabilitation process was seen as less felicitous. One condition of this

infelicity might be impaired biographical work. This would be pursuing the strategy of maximal comparison.

- In addition, there should be a comparison of German and Polish interviews (See module A2 by Agnieszka Golzynska-Grondas) regarding similarities: e.g. regarding the lack of biographical work in former life courses and lack of biographical care takers as preconditioned by a state socialist society with its macro-structural occupational selection and allocation system. This would be the comparison strategy of minimal comparison. There should also be a comparison of German and Polish or British interviews regarding sharp differences of the institutional handling of prospective rehabilitation clients. One of these sharp differences could be the systematic provision of a structural moratorium and leeway situation in the institutional organisation of the German rehabilitation process and the almost total lack of this in the institutional organization of the Polish or British rehabilitation process. One question belonging to this comparison strategy of maximal contrast is how to be able to do circumspect and sensitive biographical rehabilitation counselling under such different structural conditions. Another question would be under what biographical and institutional conditions clients of rehabilitation could productively use such an offer of a moratorium situation, and under what institutional and biographical conditions this would be biographically less productive.

Tightly intertwined with the research step of contrastive comparison are the activities of the research step of developing one or several theoretical models. These theoretical models are pathways for linking the general, alternative and distinctive features of types of socio-biographical processes, e.g. empirically appropriate and theoretically revealing processual schemes, resulting from the analytical abstractions of the several cases which have been under close study. In research projects on biographical phenomena the relationship between biographical and (other) social processes is always essential. This basic "problem constellation" of theory construction implies two different research strategies for the building of theoretical models in sociological biography research that nevertheless complementarily support each other.

The research strategy of letting oneself be theoretically guided by the natural history of a social process has to spell out biographical alternatives for realizing its stages and turning points. In a study of vocational rehabilitation the alternative institutional processing of clients could be studied with an in-built organized moratorium phase, e.g. a two-year retraining programme, and their processing without it. And then it could be asked how the clients in these two totally different treatment situations would be able or not to be able to make productive biographical use of the institutional and professional offerings. The theoretical notions of biographical alternatives to be adopted here are the result of a thinking and construction process in the fashion of a sub-dominant research strategy focused on biographical processes.

In turn, the other dominant research strategy, of letting oneself be theoretically guided by the unfolding of biographical structural processes, must also study the different social conditions for the enactment of, or succumbing to, biographical process structures. In a biography-analytical study of vocational rehabilitation there should always be a focus on the question, how the client could escape from the cumulative mess trap of the combined biographical trajectories (a) of chronic illness and its discouraging impact on an active handling of one's life course as well as (b) of long term unemployment and its paralysing impact on everyday life. (Of course, as we could see in the Funke interview, they have a mutually enforcing impact on each other.) Our central assumption is that one decisive condition for a way out of the cumulative mess of these two intersected biographical trajectories is the start and the unfolding of biographical work of the client, mainly

consisting in the working-through of the trajectory experiences. But many of the clients did not learn reflective biographical work during their life courses. One of the social and socio-structural conditions for this lack of learning is, as we saw, the systematic strategy of state-socialist work administration to allocate the citizens to work positions and to vocational training courses without encouraging them to consider for themselves what kind of occupation would fit to their unique biographical identities. Another set of socio-structural conditions could be working class socialization processes that would not stress values of individual independence. The built-up of those two social and social-structural conditions that hinder the learning of biographical work during the process of primary and secondary socialization also has process character. Hence, the theoretical explication of different social conditions of biographical processes sub-dominantly also employs the social process philosophy of constructing theoretical models. In addition, adequate social arrangements and social processes have to be considered, if the agency for vocational rehabilitation would like to support the acquisition and activation process of the client to learn and to do biographical work, in order to come to terms with the cumulative mess of the intersection of the two trajectories and to overcome their discouraging and fatiguing impact.

However, it should not be obfuscated that the dominant adoption of one or the other of the two research strategies for the construction of theoretical models in sociological biography analysis is a decision for either a "sociological study" of societal, organizational or institutional processes or a "social psychological study" of the individual and/or collective biographical enactment, of undergoing, interpreting, carrying-through, fighting, reworking and/or changing objectified social processes and structures, which are conditions of biographical processes on the one hand and objects of biographical work on the other. The partial theoretical model for biographical counselling documented in the introductory module, which is focused on supporting the biographical work of the clients through the professional counselling process in vocational rehabilitation, is a typical example of the social psychological strategy to develop a theoretical model.

## 6. Exercises

- Take an autobiographical narrative interview and identify the various phases of it. Are deviations from the strict rules of narrative interviewing in this interview? What might be the reasons for them? What is the impact of these deviations on the presentation activities of the informant?
- Assess the social relationship between informant and interviewer for this interview. Does the interviewee feel comfortable? Are there special stress situations in the course of the interview? What are the reasons for these? How is the interviewer handling such stress situations?
- Please conduct an autobiographical narrative interview yourself and formulate your experiences with the interview activity. What was easy, what was difficult? Was the interviewee satisfied with the course of the interview? How do you feel yourself about the autobiographical text you got? Is it mainly extempore narration or is it something else? Please perform a text sort analysis of this interview.
- Take an autobiographical narrative interview or a published literary autobiography and do the structural description of some part of the text. Put the result of the structural description down in sketch words, as it was done for the Funke interview. What are the difficulties of writing down the structural description? Do you feel that you were able to state more as the informer said already?

- Try to outline some features of analytical abstraction for the chosen interview. Do you find one or two central phenomena, which are worthwhile to study in additional interviews, too?
- Do you think you have learnt from your analytic activities? Does a deeper understanding of the life course of a possible client of yours come out of it? And did you get additional insights into your own counselling work (even if the conclusion would be implied that you might have made some mistakes or that you at least might have been used to perform sub-optimal activities)? Start to list the additional insights you got through the proceedings and the analysis of the interview.

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