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

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Abstract

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

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Keywords

intercultural research; intercultural communication; reflexivity; methodology; generalization

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How can the relatively young research field of intercultural communication be systemized and mapped on the background of classical approaches of qualitative social research? For this special issue „Qualitative Research on Intercultural Communication“, we invite papers in English, German or Spanish language, for publication in the international online journal Forum: Qualitative Social Research. Papers can focus on one, or a coherent combination of the suggested questions, or other thematically relevant problems. Special emphasis will be placed on papers that exemplify these problems using a...