

# Epistemic border struggles: exposing, legitimizing, and diversifying border knowledge at a security conference

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## Abstract

In this chapter, a concept of border knowledge is introduced. After an overview of the relationship between borders and knowledge within border studies and beyond, an ethnomethodological and conversation analytical perspective is deployed. Raising the question of how border knowledge in action is used as a resource to articulate border experiences and thus deal with border complexity, this chapter conducts an analysis of the epistemic border struggles at the border event *Security Conference: Eight years of an open German–Polish border. An inventory* shows how border knowledge is exposed, legitimized, and diversified. The chapter closes with a characterization of border knowledge, highlighting its multi-perspectival and processual features.

## Keywords

Border knowledge, German–Polish border, membership categorization analysis, border security

## 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on a concept of *border knowledge* and a perspective on the relationship between borders and knowledge in general. It brings together results from two independent yet intertwining arguments regarding contemporary border research. On the one hand, a lack of discussion about the epistemic dimension of borders is identified. Even though theoretical and conceptual developments, e.g. *borderwork* (cf. Rumford 2008), *bordering practices* (cf. Parker/Adler-Nissen 2014), *borderscapes* (cf. Brambilla et al. 2016) *border complexities* (cf. Gerst et al. 2018), or *border textures* (cf. AG Bordertexturen 2018) implicitly refer to the connection between borders and knowledge, a conceptual explication is still desirable. On the other hand, empirical accounts of border experiences regularly deal with questions about what people know about borders and how this knowledge

is produced and used under different circumstances, regardless of methodology and method of elicitation. But surprisingly, hardly any study treats these “data” as knowledge in its own right, as a border-related epistemic phenomenon. Border knowledge is “seen but unnoticed” (Garfinkel 1967, p. 118) and consequently does not get much attention in contemporary border studies.

Therefore, this chapter seeks to contribute to exploring this gap in three steps. It starts with a cursory overview of how the relationship between borders and knowledge has been grasped within border studies and beyond. Section 2 culminates in a call for a fine-grained analysis of the varied ways in which border knowledge is made relevant situationally. In section 3, a perspective informed by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis is deployed. It suggests taking peoples’ own reasoning about borders seriously, which means being sensitive toward the methodical articulation of border knowledge performed through categorial ordering work in interaction. This perspective resonates with methodological considerations, which on the one hand call for analysis based on the actual “borderliness” of border phenomena, and on the other hand center on the question of how border complexity is accomplished in practice. The section prepares for an analysis of the border event *Security conference: Eight years of an open German–Polish border. An inventory*. In section 4, I will show how the panel discussion of border security experts becomes an arena for epistemic border struggles. As the event evolves, those taking part in the discussion constantly negotiate what a border is and how it works, how different perspectives on that border are bound to different membership categories, and how these are connected to specific knowledge resources and forms of articulation. My analysis will concentrate on three dimensions of border knowledge: first, how the exposition of border knowledge is performed via an essentializing account; second, how the legitimization of border knowledge is connected to epistemic authority and the negotiation of membership categories such as *expert*; and finally, how the diversification of two conflicting knowledge repertoires—namely *objective security situation* and *subjective feeling of safety*—is established. The chapter will conclude in section 5 with a sketch of a concept of border knowledge that highlights the multiperspectival and processual characteristics of border-related knowledge in action.

## 2. Knowledge in border studies (and beyond)

In this section, I want to discuss conceptual approaches to the relationship between borders and knowledge, a relationship which is fundamental, since borders have an epistemic characteristic *per se*, as Vasilache (2007) shows. Thinking *about* borders is always about simultaneously thinking *in* borders. Borders are horizons, to use another metaphor, separating the known from the unknown and/or imagined, just as they separate and connect different knowledge systems. To describe marginalized knowledge “outside of the cultural mainstream” (Rhoades 1995, p. 8), a concept of *border knowledge* has been introduced in education studies by Rhoades. In his understanding, “border knowledge is most often embraced by those situated on society’s margins of race, class, gender, age, and sexual orientation” (*ibid.*, p. i). This metaphorical use of *border* designating a certain kind of knowledge which is located beyond society’s cultural boundaries resonates with Mignolo and Tlostanova’s (2006) concept of “border epistemology”, which carries a critique of Eurocentrism and the totalization of Western epistemology. Mignolo (2002) claims that our knowledge rests on “colonial difference” and therefore has to be historicized for us to gain an understanding of how alternative knowledge is made invisible, in order to open up the possibility of making it productive. This idea of “geopolitics of knowledge” then leads to the perspective of *border thinking*, which is “the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside; and as such, it is always a decolonial project” (Mignolo/Tlostanova 2006, p. 206). While on the one hand *border* in this understanding is mostly used as a metaphor to describe epistemic exteriority, on the other hand it carries the important note that contemporary political borders not only have a geographical but also an epistemic dimension.

Aside from metaphorical understandings of border knowledge and critical approaches to the epistemic dimension of borders, Li and Scullion (2006) analyze multinational corporations managing knowledge of highly geographically and culturally dispersed sources. Following the question of “how [...] knowledge acquisition, transfer and integration processes can be operationalized” (*ibid.*, p. 73) in specific settings across borders, they investigate “cross-border knowledge holders”—individuals or groups that possess information, experience, or understanding—on a micro level. Thus, they show how the transfer of cross-border knowledge needs to bridge distances in a geographical, institutional, and cultural sense. In a similar vein, research on cross-border cooperation has developed an interest in knowledge transfer across borders as part of ongoing regionalization and European integration processes. Miörner et al. (2017) analyze “cross-border

knowledge flows” linked to innovation policies, while stating that bridging epistemic barriers produces “many beneficial outcomes, ranging from new combinations of knowledge and competencies to complementarities and synergies that could be capitalized on through such linkages” (*ibid.*, p. 2). In their understanding, the flow of cross-border knowledge is facilitated through practices such as buying patents, building innovation partnerships, increasing labor and student mobility, and others.

Especially since the *practice turn* (cf. Schatzki et al. 2001) entered border studies and related fields, knowledge has increasingly become a topic in theorizing borders. While most of the literature about bordering and bordering practices conceals the role of knowledge in these processes (cf. Newman 2006), Wille (2015) explicitly refers to the practical knowledge at the heart of an analysis of “spaces of the border” via practices such as commuting. Against an essentialist understanding of knowledge, which e.g. characterizes the interest in cross-border knowledge flows discussed above, he claims that

it is not knowledge as a feature of cross-border commutings [sic] or a spatial range of validity for specific knowledge structures either side of a national border that is the central question here, but rather which knowledge can take effect, be actualised and produced or reconstructed in social practices (*ibid.*, p. 66).

In line with this situational understanding of knowledge, Baird (2017) investigates how knowledge of security practices is produced, shared, and consumed at security fairs. Replying to Frowd’s (2014, p. 230) statement that “there is very little work explicitly theorizing tacit or overt knowledges of border control”, knowledge in his view is conceptualized as “the routinized rationalities, logics, and norms practiced while working as an (in)security professional [...] an expression of constructed cultures of border security” (Baird 2017, p. 2). In his event on ethnography, he emphasizes the situated relevance of knowledge of practice in highly commercialized and geographically dispersed fairs, and concludes that “border security consists of contradictory practices and knowledges that, rather than being resisted, are reproduced through commercialized events” (*ibid.*, p. 14).

Finally, another strand of border research focusing on the discursive and narrative construction of borders has gained insights into the variability of meaning-making in the context of borders. While only implicitly explicating the links between meaning, sense, perception, and knowledge, narrative accounts of borders, for example, deal with the lexical specifics of *border talk* (cf. Pickering 2006), *border rhetoric* (cf. DeChaine 2012), ways of articulating border change (cf. Laube/Roos 2010), and in general people’s

“way of making sense of their border-related social world” (Doevenspeck 2011, p. 129). In her examination of border narratives in the US press, Pickering (2006, p. 45) notes:

How that border is narrated in public discourse [...] tells us how we routinely inscribe borders with meaning that serve to reinforce particular border imaginations [...]. Borders are performed to multiple audiences and produce not only a range of words, languages and codes to communicate their location and function, but also the border itself.

She concludes that border narratives are partly contradictory and partly concur, and thus their simultaneous existence legitimizes a state’s policing practices. Her lexical analysis stands out especially because she can show how narratives can be analyzed as organized ways of producing, circulating, and thus implementing knowledge about borders and related phenomena. In a similar vein, Meinhof and Galasinski (2002, p. 78–79) deal with cross-generational constructions of identity in the German–Polish borderland, and formulate an interest in “the complex and fluid ways in which people construct and confirm identifications at discursive level through the lexico-grammatical choices that they make in talking and narrating themselves”. They hence examine self- and other-categorizations and emphasize that using collective identity categories across a range of scalar possibilities depends on border-related contextual specifics as well as the researchers’ methods of eliciting narrative accounts.

The concepts reviewed thus show how the relationship between borders and knowledge is discussed in border studies and beyond. They raise awareness of how the epistemic dimension of borders is crucial, even if they follow a transcending understanding of *border* which is either metaphorical or underdeveloped, or essentializes in highlighting the process of crossing a border. By contrast, recent border studies focusing on bordering practices as well as border-related narratives and discourses offer conceptual suggestions, which specify an interest in borders as subjects in their own right and which can be made useful, as they highlight the practical and thus situational conditions under which border knowledge is made relevant. Against this background, in the following I will suggest an analytic perspective that grounds border knowledge in specific border phenomena. Therefore, I adopt a sociological perspective to shed light on the detailed ways in which border knowledge is situationally established and dealt with.

### 3. Investigating border knowledge: methodological remarks

To shed light on situated border knowledge, I follow a perspective that can be described as a sociology of knowledge, mainly influenced by ethnomethodology (EM) and conversation analysis (CA). EM, according to Garfinkel (1967, p. vii f.), is interested in

learning how members' actual, ordinary activities consist of methods to make practical actions, practical circumstances, common sense knowledge of social structures, and practical sociological reasoning analyzable, and of discovering the formal properties of commonplace, practical common sense actions, "from within" actual settings, as ongoing accomplishments of those settings.

CA brings this interest to the field of social interaction and seeks to identify the doings that constitute interaction *in situ*. Whereas CA has developed into a somehow technical discipline with an interest in the "machinery" of interaction (Sacks 1992), another stock of research—rooted in the beginnings of CA—labeled "membership categorization analysis" (MCA) deals with the interactional categorial ordering work that is done by members of society in the mundane business of sense-making of the world. According to Housley/Fitzgerald (2015, p. 3), "[t]his focus on the use of routine ordinary common-sense knowledge to competently navigate society [is] to be found in people's descriptions of their social world."

Thus, if we follow a line of research in border studies that is interested in *border interactions* (cf. Martínez 1994) and the everyday relevance of borders and the ways people deal with them (cf. Jones/Johnson 2014), descriptions of borders are understood first and foremost as members' phenomena (cf. Francis/Hester 2004), and any analysis must show how accounting for a border is achieved in practice. MCA is thus not a fully elaborated methodology, but rather an "analytic mentality" (Hester/Eglin 1997, p.1) toward the fine-grained specifics of "taken-for-granted knowledge-in-action" (Fitzgerald 2012, p. 305). This praxeological approach points out that practical knowledge embraces both a *knowing that* and a *knowing how* (cf. Ryle 1945). An analysis that follows this argumentation goes beyond a content analysis, in that it is interested in the methodical use of border knowledge, that is, its characteristic of being grounded in border-related common sense and its situational relevance. In this way, it matches all the requirements for a methodology that is appropriate for the subject of borders, which, according to Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, p. 7–8) should be sensitive toward "situation[s] where many different knowledge regimes and practices come into conflict," which "involves negotiating the bound-

aries between the different kinds of knowledge that come to bear on the border”.

A research strategy that is sensitive toward border knowledge and its characteristics may be oriented toward methodological principles formulated to guide qualitative border research (cf. Gerst/Krämer 2017). The first principle suggests “think[ing] from the border” when carrying out border research. Such a position is directed against two opposing yet recurrent tendencies in border studies and related fields, whose methodological consequences have not been fully reflected on: on the one hand, *borderism*, which describes a tendency to relate various phenomena with borders without showing how exactly this relationship is established and where the border comes in—voiced prominently in Balibar’s (2004) famous phrase “borders are everywhere.” On the other hand, a perspective of *borderlessness*, which states that borders have lost their significance—as proposed in the “borderless world” paradigm (cf. Ohmae 1990)—or should be seen as a secondary phenomenon of wider social processes. Thinking from the border demands an analysis that starts with the concreteness of a border and how it is made relevant, thereby being able to show the processual *borderliness* of a phenomenon, along with its conditions and consequences. A second principle suggests focusing on the ordering effects of borders. Borders are complex phenomena as they gather different dimensions, elements, actors, practices, and discourses (cf. Gerst et al. 2018). From the vantage point of border knowledge, this complexity produces and is the product of specific orders of knowledge, as a border is the place and time where these are put into some kind of epistemic contact situation, as Amilhat-Szary and Giraut (2015, p. 1) note:

While knowledge about borders is growing steadily, their constant evolution invites scholars and practitioners alike to continue to revise ideas about what they represent for us and what they do to our lives.

And most strikingly, borders facilitate negotiations about what counts as border knowledge. Taken together, these methodological considerations converge in a situated understanding of borders and articulations of border knowledge.

In the following, I will turn to the case at hand: the *Security Conference: Eight years of an open German–Polish border. An inventory* and, in doing so, will thereby follow Radu’s (2010, p. 410) insight that “borders as processes involve a diversity of actors, practices and discourses that can be [...] better grasped through events.” I will illustrate the situational occurrence and organization of border knowledge in what can be characterized as a *border event* (cf. Radu 2010), while a perspective focusing on the epistemic dimen-

sion might describe the processes constituting this border event as ongoing engagement in an *epistemic border struggle*. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) coined the term *border struggle* to refer to a border's capacity to provoke the articulation of the border, thereby producing multiple subjective positions and thus viewpoints on borders. While the concept of border struggle seems appealing as it centers on negotiations and positionalities, I want to diverge slightly from this understanding. Instead of making it a *political* question and thus emphasizing the production of political subjectivities through these struggles, I want to make it a *sociological* question and ask for the social organization of knowledge resources and interactional settings in the course of struggles concerning the reality of borders.

#### 4. *Dimensions of border knowledge: exposition, legitimization, diversification*

In February 2016, the youth organization of a German political party organized a public event, which was announced as a *Security Conference*, bringing together five experts on a podium to discuss the topic *Eight years of open German–Polish border. An inventory*. An auditorium of about thirty people followed the discussions, which took place in the German part of a twin city (cf. Joenniemi/Jańczak 2017) located on the German–Polish border. Security-related issues of border crime, matters of urban security in the border region, the development of crime rates, the establishment of cross-border cooperation in the field of security, and the visibility of border controls were discussed—issues that are a constant topic of public discussion in the border region. While border scholars have long emphasized that matters of security are central to understanding historical as well as contemporary border formations (cf. Brunet-Jailly 2007; Côté-Boucher et al. 2014), this is especially true of the German–Polish border, whose complexity is centrally built around matters of security and related aspects such as economic disparities (cf. Schwell 2008).

The event was announced as an *inventory* or a *retrospective*, tracing the developments since and the effects of Poland's accession to the Schengen Agreement and thus the opening of the German–Polish border in 2007. Until Poland joined the European Union in 2004 as part of the eastward enlargement of the EU, the German–Polish border marked an EU external border, characterized by a strict border regime. When Poland became an EU member state, the border transformed into an internal border, which indeed increased its permeability. But it was only Poland's accession to the Schengen Agreement that brought about the abolition of border controls and free movement between Poland and Germany. At that time, public



discussion was divided. While on the one hand the opening of the border was seen as opening up economic, social, and political possibilities, on the other hand it was said to increase danger and threat (cf. Buraczynski 2015). Setting up this specific spatiotemporal frame, stretching from the historical turning point to the present, the participants were engaged in collaboratively “doing history” (Willner et al. 2016) of the border, as experts and the public were brought together to share, discuss, and confront perspectives about *how things have evolved*. Thus, this border event forms part of a public discourse, which contributes to a common-sense understanding of what the border is and was, and how it should be characterized.

The event was clearly processual (cf. Deppermann/Günthner 2015). The *interaction order* (cf. Goffman 1983) of the security conference showed a structure that opened up specifically designed slots, which shaped *what* could be said about the border, *how*, and *at which point in the event*. Five *experts* were invited to share their experiences and perspectives: a member from the administration of the university where the event took place, the former mayor of the border town, a local prosecutor, a representative of the state office of criminal investigations, and a local politician. Finally, an auditorium of *visitors* followed the discussions. While they remained silent listeners most of the time, they got the chance to direct questions to the experts toward the end of the event. Their mostly passive co-presence made the security conference a *public event*, this public character ensuring linkages to a general discourse about the topics discussed. As I will demonstrate, these speaker identities articulated knowledge resources which are category-bound and which are built upon different visions of the border; as Laine and Tervonen (2015, p. 66) conclude: “the same border may look simultaneously very different and be given different value at different contexts, different levels sectors, and by different actors. The border is not one but many.” As I will show, these visions are brought into a—sometimes conflictual—contact situation.

In general, the event took two-and-a-half hours and had a structure that was announced by the moderator at the beginning and collaboratively implemented by all participants over the course of the event (cf. Meyer 2014). After an introduction from the moderator, the experts introduced themselves by stating their professional border-related background, thus legitimizing their expert status. Thereupon, all experts gave short statements, responding to the main theme of the event and the slogan *economy top, security flop*, which the moderator had introduced in his opening sequence. This was followed by rounds of questions, consisting of question-and-answer sequences between the moderator and each expert. The questions were designed in such a way as to tease out the very specific perspective of every

expert. At the end, the audience asked their questions, before the moderator closed the event. In general, the speeches by the participants were rather monologic compared to everyday conversations. This might be seen as one of the genre's affordances, as the podium discussion sought to create a space for accounts of the border, which meant shared anecdotes and unfolding perspectives, as well as displaying epistemic authority (cf. Patrona 2012).

#### 4.1 *Exposition of border knowledge: the methodical essentialization of the border and why security matters*

The security conference revolved around the question of how the accession of Poland to the Schengen Agreement affected the German–Polish border especially regarding matters of security. Such an undertaking requires participants to either reach an implicit understanding or to expose an explicit articulation of accounts that tackle the question of what the border basically *is*. Considering this as an interactional problem, the variable indexicality of *the border* itself and the various ways in which it could be made sense of becomes a major concern. In the analysis of the following extract, I want to show how one of the expert participants—a state prosecutor, working at an office of public prosecution at the German–Polish border—makes sense of the border in a way that is common to the institution he works for and the public discourse around the relationship between economic disparities between the two countries and phenomena of border crime. In doing so, on the one hand he meets the interactional requirement imposed by the moderator of responding to the slogan *economy top, security flop* and to deal with the question of *where the priorities lie* and *what can be said about them from a security-related viewpoint*. On the other hand, the prosecutor meets the requirement of formulating a workable understanding of the border and thus reduces its basic complexity.

##### *Extract 1: The border to Poland is still a prosperity gap*

*State prosecutor:*

- 1 *Economy top, security flop, provocative sentence. Maybe it*
- 2 *looks like this: the border to Poland is still a prosperity gap. In*
- 3 *recent years this has been leveled, but this prosperity gap*
- 4 *is a fact and as long as this prosperity gap is there, a certain*
- 5 *kind of border crime will always be there. Two months ago, I*
- 6 *was in the Netherlands, in Belgium, and Luxembourg and at the*

7 prosecution in Aachen, and I looked around at how they deal with  
 8 border crime. And you won't believe it, but I can say that  
 9 basically these border states have the same worries as we have.  
 10 A colleague from Luxembourg said to me: "We have a prosperity  
 11 gap with France, in Luxembourg we have domestic burglaries  
 12 committed by French gangs, we have car thefts by French  
 13 and domestic perpetrators." That means if you live in a border  
 14 region which is characterized by a prosperity gap relative to its  
 15 neighbors, you will have to live with a higher level of crime; that  
 16 is the sober truth in my opinion.

In the extract, we can see how the prosecutor performs a fundamental equation, that of the border *being* a prosperity gap (2). The verbal form is remarkable here as it carries an ontological description of the border: neither does the border mark, represent, or stand for a prosperity gap, it *is* this principle of economic disparities, regardless of academic accounts which either promote the diagnosis of a prosperity gap or consider such a characterization inappropriate<sup>1</sup>. The speaker wraps his account of the border in a temporal account, which describes a process of slight *leveling* (3), stating that the prosperity gap is *still* relevant and as such characterized as a *fact* (4). As I will elaborate on a little more in the third part of this section, in the course of the security conference, the security professionals in particular, the prosecutor being one of them, emphasized that *facts* are the main basis for their action. Facts are data-driven, assured knowledge that both states truth and makes reality workable for professionals (see extract 5). Here, it is used to *essentialize* the economic dimension of the border: Sohn (2016, p. 183) emphasizes that the term *border* frequently carries a "reduced understanding" that is "akin to a synecdoche, a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for a part". In a similar vein, Haselsberger (2014, p. 6) suggests conceptualizing *the border* as a unique arrangement of boundaries, which demarcate single facets of the border. She claims that borders become decodable by understanding them as aggregated "boundary sets". In the extract, we can see how this reduction of the border is made productive under practical circumstances. Although in the field of cross-border security, the border can *be* various kinds

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1 A close examination of the literature on this subject suggests that the diagnosis of a prosperity gap is crucial for discourses related to matters of security, while it is relativized in economic interrelations (e.g. Blaneck 2005, p. 46). This points to the multiperspectival character of borders: different (cross-)border motifs produce and are built on different forms of common sense and knowledge.

of demarcations (e.g. a *language barrier*, a *legal limitation*, a *spatial area*), following the slogan of the conference, the prosecutor makes the economic boundary relevant as part of a complex boundary set called the German–Polish border. In terms of conversation analysis, this act of *preference organization* (cf. Bilmes 1988) not only structures the conversational flow, as the other participants have to react to this characterization of the border, but opens a unique semantic field, or area of knowledge, which becomes specified when the prosecutor strongly connects the existence of a prosperity gap with phenomena of border crime. Strikingly, border crime is presented as causally connected to the prosperity gap (if a then b), as its existence is bound to the persistence of economic disparities (4–5). The explanation of this account is performed as a proof procedure when the prosecutor reports a visit to the borders between the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, and Germany, and thereby strengthens the established connection, claiming that *these border states have the same worries as we have* (9). The inserted sequence contains the *look around*-experiences (7) of the prosecutor and the quoted speech of a colleague from Luxembourg, and leads to an epistemic transformation of the connection between economics and border crime: from a current *fact*—which characterizes the temporally marked (*still, as long as*) state of the German–Polish border—to a generalized *sober truth* (16) that holds for all border regions characterized by a prosperity gap.

To sum up, the extract exemplifies how methodically achieved knowledge in action about what the German–Polish border is is designed to fulfill interactional as well as epistemic requirements. The border is essentialized regarding its economic dimension, and thereby the connection between economics and security is established. In the next part, I will demonstrate that accounting for the border under these conditions evokes the necessity to explicitly negotiate expert status.

#### 4.2 *Legitimization of border knowledge: negotiating expert status*

Even though this was not an explicitly formulated topic, the constellation of participants and the process of discussions made it necessary for epistemic authority to be constantly displayed and negotiated throughout the whole security conference. The event was characterized by a *participant framework* (cf. Goffman 1981) that was built around three membership categories. The *moderator* guided the discussions as he constantly initiated question-and-answer sequences tailored to the *experts*. He thereby asked for and enabled the unfolding of diverse perspectives that were bound to spe-

cific stocks of border knowledge. On the one hand, these were placed on a socio-spatial scale, for example when he addressed single discussion participants to speak about the *Brandenburgian perspective* or the *communal viewpoint*. On the other hand, *professional status* was used to initiate articulations of professional viewpoints. As we will see, expert status is not a stable attribute which motivates fixed categorization, but is subject to negotiation. In the opening remarks, the moderator addressed all the participants as *experts*, a membership category which is built around a differentiation between members based on topically oriented knowledge resources that they can or do draw on—or cannot draw on, which would make them *laypersons* (cf. Hitzler et al. 1994). As Mondada (2013, p. 598) pointed out, “epistemic authority can be challenged, competed with and negotiated in a flexible way within situated activities and evolving sequential contexts.” This holds true for the security conference: the participants acted differently in response to the categorization by the moderator, which led to the display and negotiation of *epistemic status* and *epistemic stance* (cf. Heritage 2012) and—as I will show in the last part of this section—a diversification of knowledge. Whereas epistemic status describes the positioning of members toward a specific knowledge domain through access to and distribution of this knowledge, epistemic stance grasps the “moment-by-moment expression” (Mondada 2013, p. 600) of this positioning, which is designed according to interactional flow. The next extract shows how one of the participants, a member of the administrative staff of the university where the conference took place, rejected the category *expert* while simultaneously establishing a common-sense understanding of what constitutes a security expert. After the moderator had asked all the participants to introduce themselves to the auditorium, the administration staff member was the first in line to do as requested:

*Extract 2: I am probably the one who can contribute least to the discussion*

*Administration staff member:*

17 Well, my name is [name] and I have been a member of the  
 18 administration of this institution for fourteen months. First  
 19 and foremost, I have already joined a talk about the topic  
 20 by [name of the prosecutor who is also participating in the  
 21 security conference] and I bow down before the factual  
 22 knowledge of others participating in this panel discussion.  
 23 Well, regarding the factual area of what happens within  
 24 border crime and security I can hardly contribute, but I can  
 25 say something general about this institution, about

26 *Europe's open borders and Schengen, and in the first*  
27 *place, I expect more information from the experts about*  
28 *how the situation actually evolves. If I remember the talk*  
29 *by [name of the prosecutor] correctly, it was surprising to*  
30 *me that whereas one could expect the crime rates to*  
31 *explode, at that time this seemed not to be the case. So, I*  
32 *would be very interested in the facts, and regarding the*  
33 *facts I am probably the one who can contribute least to*  
34 *the discussion.*

The extract starts with an introduction in its most basic form, giving the speaker's name and affiliation (17–18). In contrast to all the other participants, who use the following sequence to positively demonstrate why they are part of the panel discussion by displaying epistemic authority, the member of the administration staff produces an account that answers the question of what he could *contribute to the discussions* (34), while rejecting the category *expert*. The administration staff member does so by referring to a talk held by the prosecutor who has also joined the panel discussion. He shows himself to be highly appreciative of the *factual knowledge* which he suspects *others participating in this panel discussion* (22–23) might have. Taking the prosecutor as an example of the group of *others*—a category which, in the following, is transformed into the category *experts* (28)—he separates himself from this group and thereby confirms that having *factual knowledge* (22) is to be seen as a *category-bound predicate* (cf. Reynolds/Fitzgerald 2015) of the category *expert*. He shows that his self-categorization does not embrace this predication, by explicitly differentiating the *expert* topic of *border crime and security* from the *general* topic of *Europe's open borders and Schengen* (26). He then formulates his expectations regarding the panel discussion. This brings him closer to the auditorium following the discussion, who the moderator had categorized as *visitors* or *guests*, and who might be characterized as being “the public” to be *informed* by the event. Thus, he expects the experts to deliver *more information about how the situation actually evolves* (28). Referring again to what he remembers from the talk by the prosecutor, he emphasizes that he is *interested in the facts* (32), a kind of knowledge which is presented throughout the conference to give detailed information about the reality of the border since its opening. As he points out, not only is access to this particular knowledge restricted, as it is bound to expert status, but it might also be counterintuitive; whereas mundane reasoning suggests a connection between increasing crime rates and opening borders (30–31), the *actual situation* (28) seems to have been different.

To sum up, this extract shows how the university staff member positions himself within the group of participants regarding epistemic status and stance. Given the topic “border security,” this is not done through a direct rejection, e.g. expressing that *I am not an expert*, or the establishment of another candidate category, but through an account which on the one hand differentiates border knowledge into different resources, as he demonstrates what he does and does not know, and on the other hand breaking the categorial equation of panel participant = expert by explaining who else he thinks might fulfill the requirements of the category *expert*. In the next abstract, I want to show how another panelist, the local politician, also deals with the question of epistemic status and stance in his introduction. While he does not reject the category *expert*, he certainly raises the question of what kind of knowledge is bound to expertise.

*Extract 3: We can hear a lot from the perspective of experience during the evening*

*Local politician:*

35 My name is [name], I am thirty-six and I come from  
 36 Eisenhüttenstadt [...]. I have been in local politics  
 37 Along the Oder and Neiße for a few years and I was on  
 38 the local council in Neißemünde. Of course, you can trust  
 39 statistics only if you faked them yourself, but I do believe  
 40 that we should move away from the technical and the  
 41 feeling of what numbers can and cannot tell. Because I  
 42 think basically it is all about the feeling of safety of the  
 43 people who still are here and want to live here in the  
 44 next ten, twenty, fifty years and that they don't have to  
 45 look every time something has been stolen again. We  
 46 can hear a lot from the perspective of experience during  
 47 this evening and I am just looking forward to seeing the  
 48 great men here and maybe me as a counterpoint.

In his introduction, the local politician immediately starts to claim local expertise. In contrast to the administration staff member, he chooses not to open his account with his age and current affiliation, but with his age and place of birth (36), a town close to the German–Polish border. He continues to mention career stages in relation to the border, thus formulating this reference to the border in spatially localized terms, as the German–Polish border is marked by the rivers Oder and Neiße (37). Only implicitly, this short introduction follows the moderator’s categorization, in the

sense that it demonstrates good reason for him to be part of the panel discussion: a longstanding engagement in local politics. He then challenges an understanding of factual knowledge as being informative about the topic. He claims that *statistics* (38) and *numbers* (41), which—as I will show in the third part of my analysis—are candidates in the class of elements that constitute the category *factual knowledge*, are characterized as too *technical* (40) and lack reflection on their explanatory scope (41). He initiates his skepticism about this certain kind of knowledge by quoting a widely-known phrase in Germany—*do not trust statistics you did not fake yourself* (38–39)—which is commonly ascribed to either Winston Churchill or WWII Nazi propaganda, while its origin is still an unsolved question (cf. Barke 2004). In contrast to the member of the administration staff who claimed general knowledge which excluded him from the experts (see extract 2), in the following, the local politician introduces another repertoire of knowledge bound to the category *perspective of experience* (46), which marks a different stance toward *what* can be known about the border and *how* and—as I will show in the next section—is established as a different mode of knowing. Central to this alternative understanding of expertise is the predicate of *feeling of safety* (42), which e.g. can be tackled by being the victim of burglary (44–45). In the last part of his account, the politician transfers this general differentiation between types of knowledge into the framing of the panel discussion. While his *perspective of experience* embraces both the stance of the politician due to his local expertise as well as the reported stance of *the people* he refers to (42), within the group of panelists this makes him a *counterpoint* (48). Strikingly, he sees the relation to the other experts as an asymmetrical one, as he denotes them as *the great men* (47), claiming a somehow marginalized position for his counterpoint perspective. He thereby emphasizes his position to speak on behalf of those who have experienced border crime.

Closing this section, we have seen how the articulation of border knowledge is bound to the categorial ordering work by all participants, either claiming membership or dealing with other-categorization. Central to the security conference is the display, predication, and negotiation of the category *expert*, as are struggles about what kind of knowledge is bound to this category. In the last part of this analysis, I will elaborate a little more on how these two repertoires, *factual knowledge* and *experience*, are continuously confronted throughout the conference. I will show how they are key elements in establishing a diversification of border knowledge, built around a diagnosis of the current state of security issues at the German–Polish border, which is either described as an *objective security situation* or a *subjective feeling of safety*.



### 4.3 Diversification of border knowledge: objective security situation and subjective feeling of safety as two modes of border knowledge

The analysis so far has shown that talking about border security at the conference brought up the necessity to negotiate what border knowledge *is*. I want to dedicate this final section to a fundamental epistemic differentiation that can be traced throughout the discussion. As we will see, these two are not only perspectives but repertoires and modes of knowledge whose transferability is continuously negotiated. One of the participants, the former mayor of the border town where the security conference was taking place, mentions this fundamental differentiation early on and asked for an integrated discussion.

*Extract 4: The feeling of safety and the security situation are two separate things*

*Former mayor:*

49 [The] feeling of safety and the security situation are two  
 50 separate things, and someone who has been a victim of theft  
 51 and has been harmed feels very differently than the  
 52 statistician who looks at data about how many police are  
 53 needed, because that costs tax money, and whether we could  
 54 once again cut another few hundred to save tax money. That  
 55 is a wholly different perspective. If we manage to bring these  
 56 perspectives together, I would call this evening a success.

In the extract, the former mayor identifies a *feeling of safety* and the *security situation* (49) as two perspectives on how to account for the topic *eight years of open German–Polish border*. Furthermore, he produces a contrasting device to elaborate on the difference. The categories *victim* (of theft and harm) (50) and *statistician* (52) are contrasted to show how border crime is dealt with from these perspectives. Whereas the statistician *looks at data* to figure out *how many police are needed* (52) and thus contributes to economically motivated reasoning, the victim has been *harmed* (50) by theft and in this way—as the local politician stated above—*experienced* border crime.

*Bringing these perspectives together* (55) turned out to be a rather hard task, as the repertoires that serve as resources to articulate those perspectives were established in opposition. On the one hand, the repertoire of the objective security situation is mainly used by the prosecutor, the representative of the state office of criminal investigation and the former mayor, and consists of a class of epistemic categories like *data*, *statistics*, (case) *numbers*, *quotas*, and *facts*, which can be *compared* and *put into relation*. Thus,

how the accession of Poland to the Schengen Agreement affected the border is measurable, and therefore only retrospectively explicable. The last eight years are described as a *development* of increasing and decreasing numbers and as part of an *overall development* which goes back to the establishment of the German–Polish border. Based on this knowledge, *measures* and *decisions* are taken concerning legal adjustments, institutional cross-border cooperation, reorganization of the police, control practices, etc. On the other hand, the repertoire of the *subjective feeling of safety* is used by both the local politician and the member of the university administration. It is expressed in *experiences* and *opinions*; thus, the history of the open border is not a linear one, but one that can be articulated via stories, anecdotes, descriptions of involvement, and (real or imagined) scenarios. The consequences are *actions* and calls for action. The emotions of those talked about, as well as emotional articulation, play a crucial role.

The juxtaposition of these different epistemic repertoires is the main-spring of constant epistemic border struggles. These repertoires are situationally used stocks of knowledge which, at their heart, result from reasoning that is grounded in different border realities. In the last extract, the prosecutor closes a rather long contribution to the discussion, explicating the development of crime rates in the border region since the 1990s, and directly addresses the problem of commensurability.

*Extract 5: I can only stick to the numbers*

*State prosecutor:*

57 *Thus, the assessment of the situation concerning the level*  
58 *has decreased; in fact, what is apparent is that the*  
59 *population's subjective feeling about the level of crime has*  
60 *increased. I can't explain that, I am not a psychologist, I*  
61 *don't know, I can only stick to the numbers and the*  
62 *numbers are relatively clear in this respect.*

After the prosecutor states that the level of crime rates has decreased by a third over the last 25 years, the extract shows that he recognizes an increase in the subjective impression of the level of crime level (58–60). In an insistent sequence, he remarks that he is *not a psychologist* (60), which renders him unable to *explain* (60) this inconsistency in perception. Invoking the category of psychologist points to the individual and subjective dimension of border knowledge, to which, from his viewpoint, he has no access. Rather, numbers are established as a unit of knowledge which are able to speak *relatively clearly* (62) about the situation.

### 5. Discussion: a characterization of border knowledge

The analysis here has shown how the exposition, legitimization, and diversification of border knowledge in action was methodically accomplished at the security conference. Exposing border knowledge demands a reduction in border complexity by facilitating ordering work framed by epistemic and interactional constraints. Legitimizing border knowledge means negotiating epistemic authority based on ongoing self- and other-categorization by all the participants, and implicitly or explicitly establishing connections between membership categories and attributed border knowledge. Finally, the diversification of border knowledge rests upon different visions and experiences of the border, which not only lead to coexisting repertoires of knowing, e.g. objective situation and subjective feeling, but to epistemic border struggles.

Conceptualizing border knowledge can be helpful for a praxeological analysis of (linguistic) border work which pays attention to the professional and mundane doings that constitute borders *in situ*. Any analysis must make these knowledge resources a topic of description to gain an understanding of border knowledge as highly situational knowledge in action and to shed light on borders as an ongoing achievement. Rather than seeing border knowledge as fixed and stable, the argument is to see it as situated knowledge. According to Laidi (1998), bordering in its most basic form should be understood as a process of creating spaces of meaning—which implies an epistemic connotation. This has culminated in the call for *multiperspectival border studies* (Rumford 2012). Questioning the idea that borders are consistently visible to everybody and that the state is the principal actor engaged in borderwork, the multiperspectival study of borders aims to take into account the multiplicity of actors, experiences, perspectives, and meaning-making via border narratives that make up the complexity of borders. Consequently, and as my analysis has shown, border knowledge is diverse but still ordered, linked to specific membership categories, and bound to professional as well as mundane perspectives on the border.

As the analysis of the panel discussion has shown, border knowledge is processual in two respects. On the one hand, not only do perspectives of a border constantly change, but the border itself is in permanent motion, as Nail (2016) has shown. Either this change of the border *gestalt* is conceptualized as the outcome of external processes, e.g. historical transformation, for instance securitization, or of internal processes, e.g. changing interactions of border dimensions or evolving mobilities. Consequently, as the border changes, so does the knowledge that produces and/or is the product

of this change. On the other hand, the articulation of border knowledge is not only bound to epistemic changes, but to the situational affordances of border interactions. Articulating the border within interaction is thus a process of mutual adaption between interaction order and border complexity, so that the border can be told.

Finally, a detailed analysis of border knowledge is crucial in order to understand the commonplace that every border is unique. Kleinschmidt (2014) explains that the search for a core meaning—or a stable and fixed stock of knowledge—of a generalized understanding of *the border* must fail. Rather, we should be aware of the ambivalences of the semantic profile of the border, which are generated by the historical and social conditions under which borders are put into place. These in turn lead to various routinized ways of *making sense* of the border. To borrow a widely-known Foucauldian term: a border creates an idiosyncratic knowledge-related *space of possibilities* which is situationally established and dealt with.

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