



‘Thinking About How We Think’: Using Bourdieu’s Epistemic Reflexivity to Reduce Bias in International Business Research

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Received: 2 October 2021 / Revised: 2 November 2022 / Accepted: 19 January 2023 /

Published online: 22 March 2023

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Abstract

The paper advances epistemic reflexivity as a methodological process for dealing with knowledge biases in International Business research. By drawing upon Bourdieu’s (1989) reflexive sociology, the paper develops an epistemic form of reflexivity that moves beyond the limiting focus on the researcher’s social background and interpersonal relations with the researched, towards the conditions of knowledge production contained in the researcher’s subjective role as well as intellectual bias and positioning. Such an approach enhances trustworthiness and credibility in all research processes (qualitative, quantitative, mixed and multimethod), through a systematic exploration of social scientific claims. This can be achieved by the IB researcher scrutinising their own Self, cultural practices, biases and ‘unthought categories of thought’, which, if not problematised, may limit our understanding of other peoples’ ‘social reality’ and the IB phenomena that we investigate. The paper contributes to IB research methods literature by developing an epistemic theoretical foundation for reflexivity in addition to devising a methodological process for researchers to intellectually engage with, comprising of six reflexive, self-interrogating ‘thinking tasks’.

Keywords Reflexive sociology · Epistemic reflexivity · International business research · Bourdieu · Methodology · Research practice · Knowledge bias · Culture

The paper presents, and expands on, the epistemic reflexive framework, drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu, which the first author devised, operationalised and carried out in his doctoral thesis at The University of Warwick, United Kingdom.

We would like to thank Ann L. Cunliffe, Will Harvey, Henriett Primecz, Hinrich Voss and participants at the Research Seminar Series (organised by the Department of Business, Strategy and Political Sciences, USN School of Business, University of South-Eastern Norway) for kindly providing comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

We sincerely thank the three reviewers who provided valuable comments and helpful suggestions, which enabled us to further improve our paper.

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1 Introduction: Linking Knowledge and Reflexivity

Regardless of methodological, philosophical, theoretical, paradigmatic and disciplinary persuasion, all International Business (IB) researchers are in the business of knowledge production. As such, IB researchers are inevitably affected by knowledge biases relating to the researcher's social background, positioning in the intellectual field and intellectualisation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1990a) argues that in the social sciences, if we do not understand the things which affect how we produce knowledge, the progress of knowledge itself might be hampered. As knowledge is (re)produced in various social and cross-cultural contexts, it becomes imperative to question the social scientific claims that IB researchers promulgate about the phenomena we study (Kuhn, 1962; Maclean et al., 2012a; Welch & Piekkari, 2017). This is particularly vital to IB research due to its focus on investigating cross-border phenomena that cannot be assumed to have equivalents, or even exist, in every society we study (Buckley & Chapman, 1997a; Usunier, 2011). Although it might seem more relevant for qualitative research, reflexivity matters across the qualitative and quantitative research fields, due to both exhibiting underlying conditions that influence how we think about IB phenomena, and thereby how we produce knowledge about them.

However, this continues to be ignored, perhaps unconsciously or unintentionally, as reflected in the development of several prominent IB theories (see Shenkar (2001); Buckley & Chapman (1997b); and Williamson (2002) for apt critiques of the cultural distance construct, transaction cost theory and cultural dimension-based models, respectively, in this regard). Where it does appear, reflexive engagement has resulted in several laudable theoretical developments and new perspectives in IB research. Examples include the need to examine the determinants of outward foreign direct investments based on the premise of Chinese multinationals (Buckley et al., 2007); the emergence of indigenous research (Amaeshi et al., 2008; Holtbrügge, 2013; Redding & Witt, 2015); the benefits of producing new or alternative IB knowledge through exploring methodology beyond the mainstream (Chapman et al., 2004a, 2008; Delios, 2017; Doh, 2015; Moore, 2011); and the importance of incorporating context in IB research (Aguinis et al., 2020; Harzing & Pudelko, 2016; Pudelko, 2020; Teagarden, Von Glinov, & Mellahi, 2018). It is because of this that Buckley et al., (2017) ask why certain questions continue to be posed in IB research whereas others have not. Indeed, better reflexive engagement with knowledge production is essential if future IB scholarship is to contribute to interdisciplinary discourses and address 'grand challenges'. The significance of knowledge production demands a comprehensive engagement with reflexivity as both an epistemological and ontological concern (Alvesson, 2003), and the importance of reflexivity should motivate the research field to employ a rigorous reflexive methodological approach, and a curiosity about how we produce knowledge in IB research.

The purpose of the current paper is to develop a theoretically founded methodological process concerning how to practice epistemic reflexivity, for both qualitative and quantitative researchers. This will be achieved by drawing upon

the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, one of the most influential theorists in the post-war era (Chanlat, 2014a, b; Jenkins, 2002; Joas & Knöbl, 2009; Sallaz & Zavisca 2007; Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu's reflexive sociology can be used to advance reflexivity in IB research not only as a methodological issue (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), but as an epistemological concern regarding knowledge production.

Bourdieu (1993) defined reflexivity as 'the scientific objectivation of the subject of objectivation' (p. 63). Objectivation involves scrutinising the researcher through turning the tools of analysis back onto the researcher themselves. With this approach, IB researchers can achieve reflexive research through a systematic exploration of social scientific knowledge claims by scrutinising their own Self, cultural practices, biases and 'unthought categories of thought' (Bourdieu, 1990c; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 40). The process of objectivation must take place on three levels, or 'realms' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992):

- (i) To scrutinise the social background of the IB researcher and other impinging contextual facets;
- (ii) To scrutinise the researcher's intellectual position in the academic field; and
- (iii) To scrutinise their intellectual biases.

This incorporates important scrutiny of the relationships between the study subject, the researcher and the knowledge claims researchers make on that basis.

As human beings, IB researchers possess innate biases. Thus, according to Bourdieu, a social scientist would only be able to practice an objective science when they become reflexively aware of such biases (Bourdieu, 2004). Linking reflexivity to knowledge production is appropriate, as the former explores how subjectivity challenges the latter (Woolgar, 1988). Indeed, reflexivity concerns the opposing idea of the existence of an objective reality (and thus an objectivist ontology) as well as neutrality of knowledge (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

As the first realm above is widely acknowledged in IB reflexive methodology, the paper's methodological contributions largely relate to the second and third realms. First, we extend the focus of the concept to include intellectual bias and positioning, providing reflexivity in IB research with a necessary epistemological and theoretical foundation (Alvesson, 2003; Weick, 1999). By employing Bourdieu's reflexive sociology to this end, we can elevate reflexivity to an epistemic form integral to knowledge production beyond simply investigating relations between researcher and subject (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Second, the paper advances a theoretically grounded understanding of the IB researcher's role: by positing an inherently subjective researcher, the contribution moves beyond the conventional arrival point for reflexivity, that is to say, hermeneutic methodology. Whereas hermeneutics emphasises that understanding is formed through 'interpretation of interpretation' (i.e., solicited based on something we already know; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2021; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009), the Bourdieusian approach contributes the aspect of forming understanding based on what we do not initially know, in addition to pre-understanding the formation of knowledge as constitutive and relational to context and co-existing producers of said knowledge. Third, based on the above, we offer a

new methodological process concerning how to practice epistemic reflexivity in the form of six reflexive, self-interrogating ‘thinking tasks’ with which the researcher is encouraged to intellectually engage. This process should be engaged with during the design and conducting of the research study as a way of scrutinising the possible (negative) influence of knowledge biases. This process will also show how new perspectives and discovery of how the design itself, or how we as IB researcher have conducted the study and analysed findings, potentially provides new understanding of said data, and subsequently findings and contributions, through reflexive interrogation. We argue that the process is a new contribution because it consolidates various key elements of Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity in line with the theoretical underpinnings of this ‘reflexive sociology’.

In addition to contributing a methodological process for dealing with various knowledge biases in IB research, we argue that enhancing epistemic reflexivity has importance beyond the methodological realm. It directs focus beyond the accuracy of research designs and findings and toward a deeper and inquisitive engagement with the conditions of the IB knowledge we as social scientists are claiming to have produced. In a positive way, this forces us to consider if our research is relevant and authentic to those/what we are investigating and not a “scholastic fallacy”, in the sense of being knowledge producers based on a transposition of experienced reality, to satisfy the needs of researchers to deploy particular methods¹ or concepts in particular ways (Bourdieu, 1990b). Contesting the inherent structure of the ways we produce knowledge can further improve our ability to avoid losing out on discovering new IB knowledge by simply replicating the current architecture of conducting research (Bourdieu, 1993).

In this paper, we begin by outlining the scope of reflexive methodology in an IB research context. Second, we establish the theoretical foundation for revising the methodological process by demonstrating the benefits of Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity. Third, we elaborate on, and advance, epistemic reflexivity as a methodological process and detail a practical guide for improving and conducting epistemic reflexive research. Lastly, the paper outlines the implications for IB methodological literature of the paper’s key contribution, to wit, developing Bourdieu’s concepts of epistemic reflexivity into a practical methodology.

2 Positioning Reflexive Methodology in IB Research

This section outlines the extent to which reflexive methodologies have been adopted at the interface between IB and cognate disciplines, before summarising key trends about, and some limitations of, reflexivity in IB research.

¹ In this paper, we differentiate between ‘method’ and methodology’ as follows. The former relates to the tool for collecting data (e.g., interview, survey), whereas the latter we consider serving as the overarching research strategy for the study as a whole (see Thomas, 2004).

2.1 Reflexive Methodology in General Management Theory and in IB Studies

Although work on reflexivity in the IB discipline has been relatively limited, reflexivity has been theorised, problematised and developed in various other disciplines for more than half a century, for example, in social psychology (e.g., Gergen & Gergen 1991); in sociology (e.g., Durkheim, 1912; Latour, 1988); in international relations (e.g., Eagleton-Pierce, 2011); and social anthropology (e.g., Geertz 1973; Malinowski, 1922, 1944). Furthermore, it is key to the intellectual position of Bourdieu (1977, 1968) whose work across the humanities, philosophy and sociology placed him at the forefront of the social sciences in the latter half of the 20th century (Jenkins, 2002). Reflexivity remains a concept of paramount importance in qualitative research as a means to better understand the dynamics of internal validity of the research (Cunliffe, 2002a; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Indeed, in idiographic research, reflexivity is imperative to social science research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Geertz, 1973).

At the turn of the millennium, mainstream business studies disciplines, influenced by sociology and social anthropology, became more aware of reflexivity. Large bodies of work on reflexivity can be found in general management theory (e.g., Alvesson et al., 2008; Johnson & Duberley, 2003) and in organisation studies (Cunliffe, 2003; Chia, 1996; Maclean & Harvey, 2019; Maclean et al., 2002, 2012b; Sarpong & Maclean, 2016). Across these intersecting disciplines, several management and organisation studies scholars have advanced reflexive engagement. This is probably an indication of these disciplines' closer interface with sociology than has been the case in mainstream IB research, which has leaned more on economics (Buckley & Chapman, 1996a, b; Buckley et al., 2017; Chapman, 1997; Guttormsen & Lauring, 2018). Reflexivity has also influenced ethical aspects of management studies (Chanlat, 2015; see Tatli et al., 2015) in addition to organisational learning and change as well as teaching practices (e.g., Cunliffe 2009, 2002b; Maclean, 2012a). Hibbert et al., (2010) provide a conceptualisation of reflexivity as a process with individual and relational aspects that may be experienced sequentially by organisational researchers. Furthermore, they also side with Cunliffe (2004) in his argument that reflexive engagement is, in fact, a moral obligation placed on the researcher and not merely an instrument or technique.

Advancements regarding reflexivity have recently appeared in cross-cultural management research. Scholars have pointed out the importance of reflexivity when making sense of cultural Others, as well as a helpful tool for international managers to make sense of intercultural interaction (Barmeyer et al., 2021; Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999; Guttormsen, 2018). Nonetheless, the elevation of reflexivity to a matter of knowledge production remains underexplored in management studies, due to its late adoption, and there are particular lacunae as regards the subdisciplines of management studies relating to international business.

2.2 Key Trends and Limitations of Reflexivity in IB Studies

The treatment of reflexivity in IB research has largely been confined to a practical methodological concern for qualitative research (see Welch & Piekkari, 2006). Furthermore, the application of reflexivity has often been limited to a mere reflective

awareness regarding the interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the subject (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Johnson & Duberley, 2003). Several scholars have warned that reflexivity should not serve as an end in itself and should not be practiced as a mere box-ticking exercise (e.g., Weick, 2002), or remain a simple requirement of disclosure (Bourdieu, 2007; Hardy et al., 2001: 1998) highlight that reflexivity also entails learning from the research subject and possibly experiencing change within the researcher, as opposed to mere awareness of the relationship in between them. Despite their warnings, there appears to be a general lack of concern for reflexivity in the IB knowledge production arena. Lee and Cassell (2013) underscore both the novelty and importance concerning critical reflection of research methods and research practices. Furthermore, a practical outline or a methodological process for how to be reflexive is yet to be presented in the field.

Various IB scholars consider reflexivity indispensable in qualitative research in that it provides recognition to the constitutive effect of representational strategies on research analysis (Westwood, 2004: 75). Reflexive awareness can affect interview data (Marschan-Piekkari, 2004: 246), and the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of IB researchers can influence the ability to secure interviews (Zhang & Guttormsen, 2016) as well as the success/failure outcome of IB fieldwork, both in terms of quantitative (e.g., Harzing et al., 2021) and qualitative data collection (e.g., Travis Selmier II & Newenham-Kahindi, 2021). Furthermore, the type of sociocultural knowledge that the IB researcher possesses can influence the ability to solicit and comprehend authentic information and constructions of meaning conveyed by research subjects (Fjellström & Guttormsen, 2016). Reflexivity in contemporary IB research remains broadly limited to the interview setting, which highlights the need to devise a general methodological process for enhancing reflexivity. Otherwise, reflexivity at the methodological level is underexplored and scarcely deployed in IB research.

Furthermore, although many IB researchers are clearly aware of this issue, as reflected in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for International Business* (eds. Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004), IB research seldom discusses reflexivity at the individual level (see Jack & Westwood, 2006; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 2004b; and Westwood, 2004, for notable exceptions). The practice of reflexivity is limited to the researcher merely being aware of their relationship to the research subjects (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). This is clearly necessary but not sufficient: Jack and Westwood (2006) suggest that 'research must become reflexive and aware of its ontological and epistemological assumptions, political positioning, and ethical obligations' (p. 481). Weick (1999), similarly, argues that researchers have become more aware of their own tacit practices of theorising, but lack engagement with theoretical frameworks. There is therefore a key need in IB for the building of a theoretical foundation for reflexivity, beyond being treated as a mere practical task.

The limited engagement with reflexivity leads to several lost opportunities for knowledge discovery and advancement in IB research. First, the discipline appears yet to have completely overcome the concerns of Archer (2007), who argued that reflexivity in the form of a process was 'underexplored, undertheorised and, above all, undervalued' (p. 1). Doz (2011), for instance, does not mention reflexivity at all in his otherwise valuable article on how qualitative research can contribute to IB studies. Second, it weakens IB research's ability to achieve an enhanced level

of transparency, credibility and trustworthiness, as advocated by Sinkovics and colleagues (2008). Third, there is a dearth of approaches to incorporating reflexivity in IB research where the subjective aspect is not portrayed as detachable from the process, or a methodological process that actually seeks to harness said subjectivity. Fourth, this leads to a lack of focus regarding the epistemic aspect of Bourdieu’s reflexivity: extant use of reflexivity in IB research has focused on being reflexive towards the findings, less so about scrutinising the researcher in relation to the knowledge that they produce (Maton, 2003). This reflects the relationship that adds the ‘epistemic’ (a.k.a. the validation of knowledge) facet to reflexivity. Arguably, the prospect afforded by epistemic reflexivity to achieve more ‘phenomenon-based’ and creative research, as encouraged by Doh (2007) and Delios (2017) respectively, is not widely done in the IB discipline. Finally, given that the IB discipline is heavily positivistic (Birkinshaw et al., 2011; Buckley & Chapman, 1996b; Nielsen et al., 2020), the idea that a researcher does not produce knowledge in a culture-free vacuum (which criticism is every bit as applicable to the quantitative research realm as the qualitative) remains insufficiently problematised.

As a result, the IB research field seems to have given quantitative research a somewhat unjustified “free pass” with regard to reflexive scrutiny (see Bourdieu, 1963). This is presumably a result of quantitative research being considered ‘proper’ IB research, and qualitative research being considered unjustifiably subjective and subject to unwanted bias (Chapman, 1997; Welch & Piekkari, 2017). IB research has historically been dominated, by the positivist and functionalist paradigms that reduce complexity into pre-conceived variables, and the ontological assumption that IB phenomena can be measured objectively through the use of such variables (Delios, 2017; Lauring, Bjerregård, & Klitmøller, 2018; Welch et al., 2011). While this supports our argument regarding the notion that a researcher’s pre-conceived notions and understanding play a role in developing knowledge (Gadamer, 1994), unfortunately, the IB research field largely focuses on subjectivity and biases as a negative feature: something that can, and should, be removed in line with how scientific method assumes knowledge ought to be produced. Furthermore, the avoidance of reflexive scrutiny in quantitative research arguably reflects the poor recognition of reflexivity as integral to knowledge production. Reflexive engagement in IB research has been limited to the role of the researcher’s social background and interpersonal relations but not their intellectual biases and positioning in the intellectual field.

The following examples demonstrate the value of reflexivity to IB knowledge production. Shenkar, for instance, critiques the Cultural Distance construct (Shenkar, 2001), by arguing that “distance” is a problematic metaphor, and demonstrates that thinking about cross-cultural interaction is vastly different when considered under a different metaphorical heading, such as “friction”. Buckley and Chapman’s analysis of the short-comings of transaction-cost theory and hegemonic research philosophy in IB research argues that IB research fails to take into account the impact of individual managerial perspectives and the ‘bounded rationality’ of managers (Buckley & Chapman, 1997a, b, 1996a, b; Chapman, 1997). One might also consider the forgotten factor of perception in measuring FDI as observed in Chapman et al., (2008, 2004a), who note that although Germans and Poles score very closely on tests designed to measure cultural values, they perceive each other as being very

culturally distant, with clear implications for MNEs intending cross-cultural ventures involving these groups. Similarly, there is the highly contestable hegemony of western management theories, with Hofstede (1993) demonstrating that even seemingly universal concepts such as “management” vary considerably in different cultural contexts. Additionally, the assumed primacy of theory and neglected methodology for producing knowledge, challenged by Doh (2015) and Moore (2013, 2011), call for approaches drawn from anthropology and phenomenon-based research to provide more nuanced perspectives. However, from a methodological standpoint, the IB field largely does not take up the benefits of reflexivity. Our contribution in terms of providing a practical guide for doing so, can aid the transparency in relation to reflexive engagement. The opportunity to develop a rigorous reflexive praxis in IB is thus particularly ripe in the present context.

3 Bourdieu’s Reflexive Sociology: A Theoretical Foundation for Reflexivity

This section outlines the theoretical foundation for the methodological process which we propose, with a particular focus on demonstrating how Bourdieu’s epistemic version of reflexivity extends conventional reflexive approaches in IB research, to the discipline’s benefit.

3.1 The Concept of Epistemic Reflexivity in Bourdieu’s Work

Bourdieu’s reflexivity is at the core of his epistemological reflections within the broader discipline of reflexive sociology - which he called the theory of ‘intellectual practice’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 36) – and was integral to his vast body of work (e.g., Bourdieu 1988). He emphasised a reflexive epistemological pluralism without privileging a particular form of knowledge as representative of reality (Jenkins, 2002), which arguably stands in contract to much of the contemporary mainstream IB field with its hegemony of positivistic and objectivist quantitative research (Chapman, 1997; Delios, 2017). In Bourdieusian terms, reflexivity here takes a radically different form than narcissistic reflexivity; whereas the latter constrains self-interrogation to the researcher’s own presence in discourses (Leander, 2006) and the role of the researcher and their social relations subsides other facets of the study such as the research subject/object itself (Maton, 2003), Wacquant notes that Bourdieu’s perspective encompasses an elevation of reflexivity as a chief concern for how social and intellectual unconscious biases might influence the knowledge that we produce. The burden of maintaining the epistemological security of sociology, therefore, lies on the collective enterprise of researchers. Bourdieu’s focus on the potential biases of the researcher due to the intellectual position in the academic field sets epistemic reflexivity apart from conventional approaches in IB: the latter limits the focus to the purview of the individual, their social background and interpersonal relations with

the research subject. Bourdieu’s focus is particularly original within the social sciences (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu’s reflexivity comes with two central, and entwined, features: ‘participant objectivation’ and ‘the objectification of objectification’ (Bourdieu, 1978; Jenkins, 2002: 68). The former relates to the detachment of research and the notion of objectivism, whereas the latter entails being reflexive of the social categorisations in play as well as the research methods employed (Jenkins, 2002; Bourdieu, 2003) explained that ‘by ‘participant objectivation’, I mean the objectivation of the subject of objectivation, of the analysing subject – in short, of the researcher herself’ (p. 282). He maintained that this is different from the more commonly known (for example, through the work of Geertz (1988)) concept of ‘participative observation’ which consists in observing oneself observing, observing the observer in his work of observing or of transcribing his observations’ (p. 282). Bourdieu wanted to avoid focusing solely on (reflexively) studying the preconceptions researchers bring with them to the field to make sense of the influence on the social construction of ‘lived experiences’. Nonetheless, he felt that the primary concern should be on the ‘the social conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits–of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself’ (Bourdieu, 2001: 282). This is necessary, in Bourdieu’s eyes, to establish an appreciation of an individual’s accounts as a researcher and entails two steps: to move away from the situation itself (the researcher’s encounters with research subjects); and to take a step back from the actual act of observing (Bourdieu, 1990c; Wacquant, 1989). This type of ‘objectivation’ requires more critical self-insight than merely to account, descriptively, for categories of the researcher’s social background (e.g., being a female, a Spanish national, above 50 years of age, of engineering professional background). Furthermore, the above shows how Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity manages to fall into the temptation of narcissistic indulgence of the researcher’s own ‘self’ (see, for example, Knafo 2016), but not at the expense of enhancing our awareness of our ‘taken-for-granted’ values and assumptions that we as researchers subscribe to but are not always conscious or self-aware about (Bourdieu 1990a, 1979a, b, 1977, 1972).

As Bourdieu puts it, reflexivity is a tool intended to produce more science, and not to reduce the scope of science (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2014: 251). This point is built in in the proposed methodological process, i.e., the prospect that more reflexive engagement could lead to new and/or nuanced appreciation of the data through problematising also the impact of the researcher’s intellectual biases and position when making social scientific claims.

3.2 The Potential Uses of Epistemic Reflexivity in IB

Recent discussions in the IB discipline demonstrate a need for reflexively evaluating IB knowledge production within the quantitative realm. Examples include the debates about the implications of the replication crisis (Aguinis et al., 2017) and the claims to focus more on the ‘arrows’ and not the ‘boxes’ in quantitative research models (Thomas et al., 2011). In the latter case, a reflexive approach would encourage thinking less about the arrows and boxes themselves, and more about the fact

that neither can exist without the other, and how the two concepts shape each other. Anthropologists such as Chapman, above, use anthropological approaches to ask questions about concepts normally taken for granted in IB. However, reflexivity needs not emerge from an etic perspective, but can be generated within IB through developing reflexive practices.

For example, an experimental economist would insist on studying identity formation in a lab-like environment to remove context, whereas the interpretivist anthropologist would attempt to conduct the study of the phenomenon in a natural setting in an iterative fashion depending not only on a given context, but also on how contexts themselves are socially constructed. Both might be methodologically and epistemologically rigorous, and “right” within their respective paradigms. However, it is here that Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology invites us to interrogate the inevitable effects of the two approaches on the nature of knowledge production if uncontested, including any case of one particular approach being considered “research proper”. It involves the danger of failing to investigate ‘the *differentia specifica* of the logic of practice’ and subsequently failing to offer systematic critique of ‘presuppositions inscribed in the fact of thinking of the world’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 39). This supports Williamson’s (2002) point about the unhelpful approach of criticising dimension-based cultural models based on logical inconsistencies in methodology, rather than the strictures of the paradigmatic boundaries, as the methodology might have been correctly carried out based on said paradigmatic logics.

Such cases are where Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity is most helpful, as it turns our attention to the ways in which intellectual biases and positions, in broader terrains of paradigms, influence how we produce knowledge. According to Bourdieu, scientific progress is predicated on contesting such ‘presuppositions’, which might be taken for granted by researchers who subscribe to a particular paradigm. As Kuhn (1962) noted in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ‘successive transition from one paradigm to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science’ (p. 12). Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity, and the proposed methodological process in this paper, can enable us to achieve what Buckley and colleagues (2017) have proposed for IB’s future direction, i.e., more interdisciplinary research and tackling ‘grand challenges’.

Hence, it is not only the researcher’s own biases that need scrutinising, but also those embedded in the practice of the researchers’ subject fields and disciplines, and those of the academy as a whole (Maton, 2003: 58). This is why researchers ought to commit to a ‘systematic exploration of the unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 40), beyond a ‘reflection of the subject on the subject’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 40).

Although we are focusing on Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity in particular in the current paper, it is important to point out that his thinking regarding this concept was part of, and integral to, a much wider social scientific enterprise of his, to wit, reflexive sociology (Bourdieu, 1989, 1990c; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 36). In this context, Bourdieu operationalised various conceptual ‘thinking tools’ into a Theory of Practice (Swartz, 2008). He strongly warned against scholastic theorising (Karayli, 2004) as well as dualistic thinking that leads to logical contradictions (Everett,

2002); and as a key contribution, he emphasised relationality as the ontological and epistemological foundation of human practices, leading to a diffused representation relating to the inseparable nature of agency and structure (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008) that enabled the moves beyond essentialism. Everett (2002) explains that relational analysis comprises ‘the idea that things, states, and substances are not the stuff of social reality, that “what exist in the social world are relations – not interactions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 95) (p. 70). To Bourdieu, relationality was the building block of epistemology as the “politics of science” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 15, 47) that were conditioned by relational/changing socio-political factors. This led to the notion of the “construction of the pre-constructed object” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 229), which means the supposedly neutrality is contestable (Everett & Jamal, 2004).

Bourdieu (1990a) argued that if researchers are not freeing themselves from just following the rules dictated by assumed fixed and objective structures surrounding our practices, and interrogating the lenses we as researchers gaze through when making social scientific claims about phenomena and the social world, the knowledge that we produce are likely to be destined to only reproduce said structures and how the research field is constituted, which ultimately can hamper scientific progress and actual change (Bourdieu, 1990a). This is the chief reason why epistemic reflexivity is highly valuable as such mechanisms pertain to any academic discipline and endeavour.

3.3 Potential Issues with Epistemic Reflexivity

Nonetheless, Bourdieu’s approach to epistemic reflexivity is not without criticism. One such critique relates to the way in which Bourdieu elevates reflexivity as something that can be realised in the purest form, as a universal, all-encompassing ‘lifetime of cynical planning’ (see Jenkins 2002; Telling, 2016: 151), at the expense of the messiness of everyday social life where individuals deal with tasks based on decisions within the given context without having to subscribe to sociological individualism (Lahire, 2011: 151). This relates to another criticism, relating to the concept of ‘agency’. Bourdieu places heavy emphasis on the individual’s responses being down to habitual patterns developed out of said individual’s past experiences (especially class and education) and the ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990c). Some argue this view borders on determinism (Jenkins, 2002), which Lahire argues leaves little room for the situational context, and objective structures, as impinging and conditioning factors of agency (see Boltanski, 2011). This is in addition to the role of reflection on previous experiences that might alter the deployed course of actions, such as new learning from past experience, and adjusting responses to short and medium-term strategies (Lahire, 2011).

A third area of critique centres on the issue of subjectivity: whether or not it is really possible to be objective about one’s sense-making of the world and detach oneself from observing (Alvesson & Sköldbörg, 2009; Berger & Luckman, 1966). Arguably, being objective about subjectivity is paradoxical and cannot be entertained even in abstract or pure analytical fashion. Nevertheless, this paper argues

that an IB researcher can enhance a more objective gaze at own social scientific knowledge claims through evaluating sources for knowledge biases (to be discussed in ‘thinking task’ 1).

Furthermore, we would suggest, reflexivity – and especially the *epistemic* form – is needed alongside concepts such as ‘rigour’ and ‘validity’. Where the two latter concepts concern requirements for creating good scientific research, reflexivity can serve as a strategy for enhancing said attributes, through ensuring that potential influence from the researcher’s knowledge biases are transparent (Grodal et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is possible for a study to have rigour and validity, and yet still contain unchallenged biases and assumptions which undermine the value of the research on another level: see, for instance, McSweeney, Brown and Iliopolou’s (2016) criticisms of Hofstede’s cultural research with particular regard to its utility as a predictive tool. We would argue that rigour and validity are necessary to ensure the value of research, but not sufficient; the addition of reflexive practices ensure the research is solid on other levels.

In essence, then, increased self-awareness - meaning, awareness of the conditions of the social scientific claims that we put forward, and how we produce knowledge as well as the strictures and consequences of subjectivity – enhances the researcher’s ability to take a step back and think critically about knowledge production. Reflections on the acquisition of data and the research process adds improves credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

4 Advancing a New Methodological Process: Six Self-Interrogating ‘Thinking Tasks’

The six self-interrogating ‘thinking tasks’ outlined below are anchored in a Bourdieusian reflexive sociology. As such, they require the researcher(s) to evaluate, and interrogate, their own thinking, research practices and design as well as purported social scientific claims. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to outline and organise the key thrust of Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity into a set of ‘thinking tasks’ with which a researcher should engage. Everett’s (2002) way of ‘doing Bourdieusian research’ (p. 70) focuses on Bourdieu’s conceptual ‘thinking tools’ and not epistemic reflexivity specifically. According to Hibbert’s (2021) excellent book on reflexivity, a systematic and holistic process of conducting epistemic reflexivity integral to the design and analysis processes, have not been offered. Consequently, we have chosen to include the six ‘thinking tasks’ below as reflecting the key elements in Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology and his particular emphasis on epistemic reflexivity.

The IB researcher ought to engage with the ‘thinking tasks’ particularly when designing and conducting a study, in addition to when collecting and analysing data, with a view to evaluating the need to alter the focus and architecture of the study as well as the nature of the analysis, if it is deemed that a revised approach can reduce biases for knowledge production. The researcher can thereby enhance the degree of credibility and trustworthiness as well as authentic and phenomenon-based research (Alm & Guttormsen, 2021; Creswell & Miller, 2002; Doh, 2015;

Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sinkovics et al., 2008; Welch & Piekkari, 2017). This effort would lead to the emergence of theoretical, empirical and/or epistemological insights, which serves as a cornerstone in scientific inquiry.

Although the ‘thinking tasks’ are presented in a numbered order, they should not be understood as a linear, sequential process as different research projects necessitate focus on different parts of said tasks (in particular, tasks 1–5). The epistemic reflexive process should be thought of as the process of scientific inquiry itself and, thus, not only as a means to validate an interpretivist research approach. We recommend researchers keep a research diary to record the contents and outcome of the ‘thinking tasks’ (Nadin & Cassell, 2006), which helps to consider potential changes and to enhance transparency.

As an example, after progressing through the six ‘thinking tasks’ during the problem identification phase, the researcher might become aware of that particular questions that were assumed to be the most relevant might have been (too) heavily influenced by their sociological training. It is not an issue of right or wrong, but of being aware how the above affects the dynamics of knowledge production and outcomes. This could lead to fruitful considerations about the degree of centrality the chosen research problem has among those (or phenomenon) we are actually investigating (Doh, 2015). The researcher, then, needs to consider if such revelations should lead to changes in other parts of the research design, such as the research questions.

We will now consider each ‘thinking task’ in turn, outlining and explaining each, discussing its significance and, where possible, providing an illustrative IB example.

4.1 ‘Thinking Task’ 1: Researcher to Self-Interrogate Own Social and Intellectual Makeup

This ‘thinking task’ requires the individual researcher to engage with ‘participant objectification’ (Bourdieu, 1978; Wacquant, 1989: 33); namely, interrogating their own background and biases. To Bourdieu (1978), knowledge is always relational, and therefore it is important to attain understanding about how an IB researcher produces knowledge (a.k.a. objectification). Preconceptions are inevitable, and to have “an empty mind” (Fetterman, 1998: 1) is impossible. Bourdieu (1993) highlights the importance of avoiding to conflate own viewpoints about the phenomenon under scrutiny as a poor disguise for making a social scientific claim, and to avoid unknowingly projecting a biased view onto the subject under investigation (Bourdieu, 1990b). If we do so, it may limit our understanding of other peoples’ ‘social reality’ and the IB phenomena we study. This objectification of the researcher (a.k.a. participant) serves as the foundation for conducting epistemic reflexive research.

To do this, the individual researcher needs to assess three primary sources of closely related knowledge biases when making social scientific claims (Bourdieu, 1990c; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992):

- 1) To interrogate your own social background as the researcher (e.g., socio-economic class, ethnicity, identities, nationality, historical-political positioning, self-awareness);

- 2) To interrogate your position as the researcher in the intellectual field (e.g., research training, ‘school of thought’ and research philosophical underpinning ascribed to, what considered as ‘interesting’ and ‘valuable’ research as per own values); and.
- 3) To interrogate your ‘intellectualist bias’ as the researcher, i.e., the lenses the researcher gazes through (e.g., (mis)perceptions of other research streams, ontological positions about how the world works, appreciation of limitations associated with theorising and methodological deployment).

A good example relating to the first form of bias might be found in Mahadevan (2011), where the researcher reflects critically on the impact that their gender, ethnicity, class, and cultural competences had on their ability to gain access and their interpretations of data. While studying knowledge management, the researcher both consciously and unconsciously contributes to knowledge creation and management within the corporation, and this process is explored in Mahadevan’s analysis. Van Maanen (2011) takes a different, but equally reflexive, approach, which relates more closely to the second form of bias. He considers management literature as a genre with its own different narratives for talking about culture and using this lens to interrogate how the researchers’ own characteristics affect the study. Finally, Brannen’s positions as both an insider (emic) and outsider (etic) to Japanese culture come through in her seminal paper ‘Bwana Mickey’ (1992), exploring the indigenous (etic) reasons behind the differences between Japanese and American theme-parks, explicitly criticising the practice of imposing American postmodernist frameworks for analysis of non-American phenomena. Her commentary on the influence of different worldviews highlights the third form of bias in particular.

4.2 ‘Thinking Task’ 2: Researchers to Self-Interrogate into Intersectionality and Social Categorisation

The researcher can build upon the previous task by incorporating intersectionality. As a heuristic device, intersectionality relates to how individuals are experiencing multiple social categories or divisions, as well as their interplay in terms of building an understanding of sociocultural life when not having to rely on only one category (e.g., nationality) for sense-making. Furthermore, intersectionality explains the interconnections and interdependencies within and between different categories, which means as IB researchers, we *connect* and *disconnect* certain elements of the IB phenomena we investigate (Lücke et al., 2018). Furthermore, the meanings of the categories we use, due to the previously mentioned rationality, are relative to the other categories employed in the study (Shields, 2008). IB researchers should explore how different facets (or categories) of our own academic and social background might influence data analysis in different ways. Researchers should therefore build upon their initial interrogation of their own perceptions and biases to pose questions about their treatment, and categorisation, of collected data, findings, explanatory-sources and conclusions.

There is very little discussion in IB research about the basis on which we, as researchers, decide which context to incorporate in a study. If we had chosen to position a study within a different context, it might be that we would have understood or interpreted the data differently. For example, the mainstream approach in reductionist IB research reflects bias from intellectual positioning in that it treats context as “noise”; something the researcher can opt to exclude or include at their discretion (Brannen & Doz, 2010; Michailova, 2011; Pudelko, 2020). Such an ontological stance is not neutral or objective, although it is often assumed as to be: for instance, it constraints the intellectual inquiry to explore how the research subjects themselves might socially construct ‘reality’ (Berger & Luckman, 1996), and fails to recognise that incorporating the context offers richer data (Tsui, 2007).

Furthermore, intellectual biases generated from the abovementioned positioning in the field arguably result in research designs that are not always in line with relevant aspects of the phenomenon being studied. For example, IB research gives primacy to the firm level in researching culture (Buckley, 2002; Guttormsen et al., 2018), which Harzing (2003) points out means that researchers focus on academic constructs such as Cultural Distance rather than considering the experiences of the managers who are actually making decisions regarding how to enter a new market. Similarly, Chapman et al., (2008, 2004a) and Buckley and Chapman (1997a) empirically demonstrate that the concept of Cultural Distance as measured by academics is less relevant to managers than the managers’ own perceptions of distance between cultures which is informed by socio-political and historical contexts. Additionally, intellectual biases can also be traced across dimension-based and etic cultural frameworks that have dominated cross-cultural IB research since its inception. Subscribing to the positivist paradigm leads to accepting that researchers are comparing the etic (the things all cultures share), which effectively can say little about the emic (the context and cultural specific characteristics of a culture).

This fact becomes particularly important when studying other cultures and conducting intercultural fieldwork, because respondents in the other culture might categorise us and IB phenomena in ways we did not know existed. Furthermore, what we gauge as significant in our own world might be insignificant to others, when no existing equivalents exists relating to own culture’s concepts, meaning construction, and linguistic expressions in the other culture that we interact with or study (Guttormsen, 2018; Usunier, 2011). Without interrogating our position in the research process, furthermore, we might not realise that this has happened.

For example, regarding the influence of social background on knowledge bias, Koveshnikov and colleagues (2019) argue that thinking about gender as binary is unhelpful, as in real life gender performs with other (sub)categories of identity. This may lead to collected data, in both qualitative and quantitative studies, looking quite different: for instance, perhaps the finding does not relate to a difference between genders, but rather a particular age group or profession (irrespective of gender) where gender becomes instead a secondary explanatory-source. One study found that an expatriate’s foreignness sometimes mitigated the effect of their gender in the eyes of their local interlocutors (Adler, 1987). These more nuanced findings can be detected when different parts of different categories are intersected.

4.3 'Thinking Task' 3: Researcher to Self-Interrogate Own Conceptualising and Theorising

This task is integral to Bourdieu's reflexive social theory in that it involves using 'the Thinker against the thinker', i.e., evaluating the IB researcher's (a.k.a. the 'thinker' in lower case) position and involvement in the study by applying the same concepts/theoretical framework/models (i.e., the 'Thinker' in upper case) to analyse the relationships employed to investigate the research problem in question (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It combines the interrogation of self from 'Thinking Task' 1 with the interrogation of knowledge from 'Thinking Task' 2 to serve as a self-analysis of the researcher as a cultural producer (rather than a situated individual, as in 'Thinking Task' 1) through the conducted research within socio-historical contextuality (King, 2000; Wacquant, 1990).

Any researcher needs to reflexively inquire whether the research questions we pose would have been different if they were or were not a product of particular cultural views into which we have been socialised, sometimes leading to researchers fixating on the histories and worldviews of others. Therefore, we need to consider if we would have produced different knowledge by, for example, incorporating more indigenous views. This can be a difficult line of inquiry, as it threatens to challenge the identities into which we have been socialised, but it can be argued that the discomfort on behalf of the researcher is necessary for the sake of knowledge production. In the (so-called) "Western" world, for instance, political scientists and others often forget that the narrative of the "fall of communism" is indeed a very "Western" story. To people in Asia, dominated from 1949 by the communist People's Republic of China flanked by the communist states of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and North Korea, the idea of democracy conquering communism does not seem so obvious. In IB, such reflexive engagement should lead to questioning the core assumption relating to cultural dimension (i.e., that an "outsider's", etc, perspective exists), given that we are all 'cultural producers' (Wacquant, 1990) – and the two perspectives are incommensurable in a Kuhnian (1962) sense.

This brings us to the issue of intellectual bias concerning the latent hierarchy in IB research (and elsewhere) when it comes to single-country studies. Authors are often told, when submitting their papers to the American-dominated management journals, that focusing on one country is considered to be a shortcoming. However, from the start of the discipline in the 1950s, the majority of scientific management research is predominantly based on one country – specifically, the USA – yet this is not treated in the same way. Management phenomena studied within American companies are just as culture-specific as those from companies of other national origins, but are not subjected to the same "Othering" as those from African, Asian, Middle Eastern or European companies.

When we deploy theoretical frameworks and models, we need to reflect on whether other approaches would have produced "better" knowledge, and what would be the difference to our studies, as part of the arguments in defence of a particular approach. Any intellectual field is a product of its history (Guttormsen et al., 2021). If cultural anthropologists or sociologists had been the first to invent the IB discipline, IB research might have exhibited additional or alternative focuses today. The

methodological and theoretical arsenal that came along with this particular discipline plausibly led to marginalising ‘context’ and possibly too much emphasis on identified universal theory at the expense of context-specificities and emic methodologies (Chapman, 1997).

Numerous examples exist which reflect how a particular intellectual position can lead to a biased lens through which we perceive, and subsequently theorise about, ‘reality’. For example, transaction-cost theory has the researcher assuming knowledge about events that have not transpired as a basis of claiming why another decision for foreign investment was made. As discussed earlier, theories on knowledge production become constrained if assuming it can only be built on relationships between boxes or the directions of the arrows as far as a model is concerned.

As a further example, the reluctance of IB scholars to learn from the literature in other fields (Buckley et al., 2017), may explain why Hofstede’s (1980) landmark study concerning cultural dimensions at the time remained unchallenged within IB for so long. His study, positioned in the functionalist paradigm (Williamson, 2002), made ‘no attempt to link with recent social science literature’ (Triandis, 1993: 133). This is a problem since, as Guttormsen (2015: 344) notes, the study.

Was published after major intellectual advancements had transpired in the more mature classical social sciences; such as in the 1960s when shifting its epistemological focus from positivism (function) to interpretivism (meaning), and where Social Anthropology largely abandoned attempts at quantifying cultural research during the 1960s and 1970s (Chapman, 1997).

Had Hofstede incorporated then-current movements within other social sciences into his earlier study, IB studies as a whole might have developed a more nuanced and accurate basis from which to study culture and its relationship to nations.

4.4 ‘Thinking Task’ 4: Self-Interrogating New Learning of Data Through External Scrutiny

In this task, the researcher’s original and potential findings from the previous three ‘Thinking Tasks’ should be put to a scholarly or practitioner collaborator who is external to the research process, but one who is also familiar with the researcher, to provide an etic perspective.

This external person would evaluate, and take part in, the reflexive interrogation of the researcher as it might be easier for the external personal to point out ‘unthought categories’ that the researcher might not be aware of him or herself. This would help the researcher to exercise the highest degree of awareness of his or her role in producing knowledge through a collective enterprise. This could also take the forms of co-authorships and/or collaborative ethnographic research: the IB researcher would design, conduct, analyse and present ethnographic research in collaboration with the research subjects, a team of researchers and stakeholder groups (see Cassell et al., 2019). The above approach challenges the notion of a

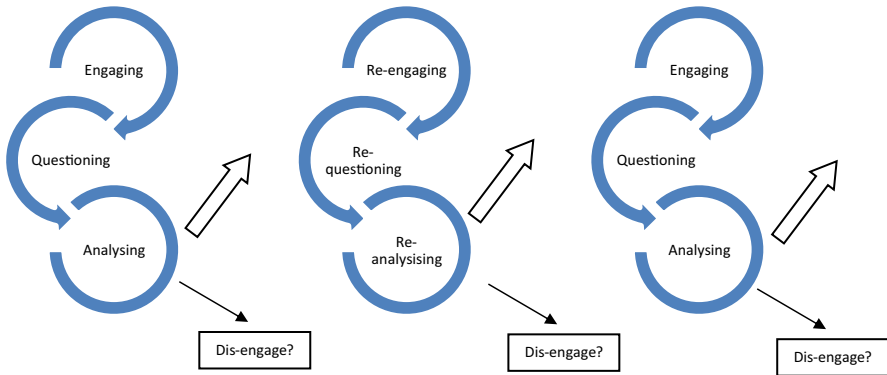


Fig. 1 The ‘cyclic conversation’ of re-engaging, re-questioning and re-analysing

‘single perspective’, and encourages the use of multiple perspectives (Bourdieu, 2000; Bourdieu et al., 1999).

While the nature of academic publishing discourages researchers from disclosing the role collaboration with research subjects played in the project’s analysis, meaning that examples are hard to find, it is worth noting that many of the papers we have cited above have been co-authored (e.g., Buckley & Chapman 1997; Chapman et al., 2008; Chapman et al., 2004a) or have involved reflections on the work of others in the field (see Van Maanen 2011). This practice thus exists in IB at an informal level; here we simply propose codifying and incorporating it as part of a wider practice of epistemic reflexivity.

4.5 ‘Thinking Task’ 5: Revisiting Data Through (Re)Engaging, (Re)Questioning and (Re)Analysis

At this stage, the IB researcher must self-interrogate concerning the questions identified in tasks 1–4 (about things we know - or think we know), and subsequently, as the present ‘thinking task’ proposes, to (re)engage, (re)question and (re)analyse the collected material as a result of the learning accumulated through carrying out the four preceding ‘thinking tasks’ (Fig. 1). By doing this, we challenge alleged ‘common sense’, status quo, and so-called ‘truths’. According to Bourdieu, this can be achieved by scrutinising the researcher’s own self, cultural practices, biases and ‘unthought categories of thought’, assists in becoming more aware of what we are only unconsciously aware of - but not an attempt to remove bias. The influence of biases should instead be utilised as interesting stories for published articles on methodology and research practices, and, more importantly, as a process for the (re)discovery of new meanings of our data and analysis.

Indeed, it is the revisiting of data that reflects the core of transforming the concept of epistemic reflexivity into a methodological process. The various ‘thinking tasks’ proposed for reflexive self-interrogation become a methodology only when re-engagement leads to the data appearing different when compared to the first attempt

to analyse it. New, different or nuanced understanding of collected data can then emerge. Revisiting data constitutes a process because the researcher is not necessarily collecting new information, but the way they treat and cultivate this data transforms it. A more significant step to making it a methodology and not ‘just another analysis round’ relates to revisiting the data with a different perspective to the original analysis. This new perspective can be identified through questioning, or via new learning. It is a methodology rather than a method due, as mentioned, to the fact that it is based on the re-analysis of existing information rather than the gathering of new data. This does not mean, of course, that new data could not be collected, as there may be times when initial data is deemed non-credible and/or that additional data-collection efforts need to be considered to add value to the study, but that this is not the primary objective of the exercise.

The epistemic reflexive methodological process is, thus, an ongoing cycle of questioning and learning, followed by re-engagement with said data/findings (or at least one additional round of it). Ideally, if warranted by the data, the process of re-questioning discovers new social realities, new findings, new understanding of relationships and additional explanatory sources. If this happens, that is exactly what it means to be authentic to ‘how the data speaks’ and to be ‘phenomenon-based’ (Doh, 2015): to discover what your data means and ensure what/who we study is being researched within their authentic worldviews and social realities.

Figure 1 also illustrates how further re-questioning might not lead to new discovery, leading the researcher to dis-engage with the process. If disengagement occurs, that should not be taken as a failure, as simply going through the process has an intrinsic value in that the IB researcher has at least explored the possibility for identifying, and learning from, nuanced data. Without making an attempt, we would not know if more nuanced appreciation of the data could be achieved and would enhance authenticity, credibility and internal validity of the purported claims.

This is another area where it is hard to find examples in the literature, due again to the way in which methodologies are presented in academic papers: methodology sections tend to focus on the technical aspects and can often resemble an attempt at an “objective” report where the aim is to safeguard against criticisms from reviewers about lack of accountability and reliability. The methodology section is also constrained by limited space, which means accounts of self-deliberation are often left out in order to prioritise the data and analysis. All of which means that little space is devoted to portraying the researcher’s lived experiences of practising the study. Nonetheless, reflection and self-interrogation of this kind can be seen in papers looking back on longitudinal research (e.g., van Maanen, 2010), or reflecting on taken-for-granted methodological practices in IB research more generally (e.g., Westney & van Maanen, 2011).

4.6 ‘Thinking Task’ 6: Reflexivity as a Precursor of Social Change and Progress

In this task, the researcher re-engages with the data, but with the knowledge and insight obtained from the previous work on the other five ‘Thinking Tasks’, and considers it in the wider context, not simply within the confines of the questions addressed by

the project. Bourdieu (1993) proclaimed that reflexivity is even more important than critical thinking and reflections, as it ‘opens possibilities for rational action, aiming at undoing or redoing what history has done’ (p. 348). Leander (2002) notes:

Reflexivity matters not only for good science but for progressive politics. It matters because it is a way of analysing and understanding, but also of changing the role of science in reproducing social and political hierarchies and values (p. 606).

Thus, when researchers conclude the five preceding ‘thinking tasks’ and re-engage with the data, they should pose the question: does the knowledge obtained through accumulated learning position me, as an IB researcher, so as to create change in society and/or to engage in responsible social scientific research conduct? This is why this particular sixth ‘thinking task’ is placed outside the process of (re)engaging, (re)questioning and (re)analysing.

The sixth ‘thinking task’ positions IB researchers in such a way as to allow them to connect with key global trends in scientific research: for example, the European Union’s ‘science with and for society’ and ‘responsible research & innovation’ agendas. These are at the forefront of scholarly debates and are drivers for producing, exchanging and capitalising on knowledge and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Reflexivity matters, not only because it has the potential to constitute a helpful methodological process in scholarly research that might lead to new, different and nuanced findings, but also to enhance the rigour of scientific research through transparency and having the chance to contest societal structures which might hamper scholarly development and/or positive change in society.

Table 1 summarises the key aspects of the ‘thinking tasks’.

5 Conclusion and Methodological Contributions

This paper has used Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology as a theoretical foundation to develop a methodological process for practicing epistemic reflexivity in IB research (and beyond), which is relevant for scholars across qualitative, quantitative, multi-method and mixed-method research endeavours. Through focusing on knowledge production as well as incorporating intellectual bias and positioning, rather than only the social background and interpersonal relations of researchers, epistemic reflexivity conceives important benefits. Through this process, we gain the opportunity to achieve a new, different and nuanced understanding of data and to enhance transparency, improving the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. By providing a set of ‘thinking tasks’ to guide the researcher, moreover, we have developed a contribution which can be used in other fields of management research as well as IB studies, as a template for researchers to use to practice and evaluate reflexive techniques.

The paper advances the IB methodological literature and research, in both qualitative and quantitative areas, five ways (see Corley & Gioia 2011). First, as encouraged by Alvesson (2003) it anchors the methodological debate concerning reflexivity in a theoretical foundation through a focus on knowledge production, the epistemologically founded epistemic form of reflexivity. This moves the debate

Table 1 Summary of ‘thinking tasks’

No.	‘Thinking tasks’
1	Researcher to self-interrogate own social background, position in intellectual field and intellectual biases
2	Researcher to self-interrogate own conceptualising and theorising by applying the same concepts deployed to scrutinise the phenomenon being studied to your own position as the researcher and involvement in the study
3	Researcher to self-interrogate into intersectionality and social categorisation (and their meanings and social constructions); the interconnections and interdependencies as well as treatment, and categorisation to explore how reasonable fixed categories might influence knowledge-production. As a tool, the above should also be directed towards how different facets of the researcher’s background might influence the research process in various ways
4	Researcher to self-interrogate into own ‘unthought categories’ that he or she might not be aware of—as re-framing of own analysis might change due to learning encounters with an Other—through external scrutiny by a collaborator known to the researcher but external to the research process
5	Researcher to self-interrogate into, and keep questioning, about things we know (or think we know), re-analysing and re-engaging (or dis-engaging) in regard to the collected data and findings to discover new nuances and understandings of said data
6	Researcher should evaluate how ‘epistemic reflexive’ self-interrogation has the potential of executing new action in, and benefiting, wider society (for example, the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals) by avoiding science reproducing social and political hierarchies and values

beyond the conventional focus on the researcher’s social background and their relationship with the research subjects, to incorporate facets of the researcher’s intellectual biases and positioning in academic fields. This draws upon Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), including his ‘participant objectivation’ and ‘the objectification of objectification’ (Bourdieu, 1978; Jenkins, 2002: 68), and the epistemic capital highlighted by Maton (2003).

The second contribution relates to the understanding of researchers as ‘cultural producers’ (Wacquant, 1990), or the ‘instrument of analysis’ (Sanday, 1979), and thus, as being an inescapable element of knowledge production due to not only the role of subjectivity as a result of their social backgrounds and interpersonal relations, but more importantly, the researcher’s intellectual biases and positioning. This change in perspective should call into question several of the IB models and theories that have been developed, which have been founded on the notion of an existing objectivity and/or objective researcher.

Third, we have advanced epistemic reflexivity, as reflexive self-interrogation, into a practical approach for deploying, and engaging with, ‘thinking tasks’ as a means to (re)discover new, different or nuanced findings in our data and, as per Sinkovics and colleagues (2008) to achieve enhanced transparency, credibility and trustworthiness. Conducting epistemic reflexivity should become a mandatory evaluative criterion for ‘good research’ (Welch & Piekkari, 2017: 711) for all researchers in IB and in wider management studies disciplines. Furthermore, it should not be limited to qualitative research, but should be practiced across qualitative, quantitative,

multi-method and mixed-method research, and be demonstrated in scientific outputs, since, having situated the methodological process in the realm of knowledge production, the self-interrogating tasks and evaluating knowledge biases are relevant for all forms of research. For example, disciplinary and methodological training affects how we analyse data regardless of whether one is a qualitative researcher working from a social anthropological perspective or a quantitative researcher in IB who subscribes to econometrics. Such criteria also need to be made specific for the paradigmatic dynamics of the research undertaken.

Fourth, we have demonstrated how epistemic reflexivity can, and should, be conducted integral to the process of scientific inquiry itself. However, that the outline of such a process needs to be developed depending on whether the study in question is qualitative or quantitative. As regards the fifth contribution, we direct attention towards the theoretical and epistemological foundation of Bourdieu's 'epistemic reflexivity' itself.

Finally, in terms of methodological practice, we have demonstrated the need for, and relevance of, enhanced reflexive self-interrogation. On this basis, we propose that sections on method(ology)/research design should feature the researcher explaining how they conducted a self-reflexive analysis, the conditions for such deliberation, and the potential outcomes. To achieve this, reviewers and editors need to remain open to somewhat more "messy" methodology sections that do not present the various steps in the more conventional, linear approach. For example, data collection and analysis cannot always be presented as sequential if the two phases indeed occur in tandem. Furthermore, self-reflexive deliberation involves revisiting the data and initial analysis, necessitating a cyclical approach to research production. Researchers, whether quantitative or qualitative, must be willing to put in the time and intellectual effort to deliberate with themselves regarding their own knowledge-production. We would encourage publishers and editors to set a new standard in their outlets, by requesting that a self-reflexive account should be included as an appendix or a required subsection in the Methodology section of the paper.

In sum, this paper builds upon Bourdieu's ground-breaking concept of epistemic reflexivity by using it as the basis for a methodological process in IB research. In doing so, we are able to address a key issue in both qualitative and quantitative IB research, namely, the need for greater reflexivity and awareness of the different perspectives which inform any given study. Through incorporating the "thinking tasks" into their methodological practice, IB researchers can develop more robust, reliable and valid research papers.

Acknowledgements We would like to thank Ann L. Cunliffe, Will Harvey, Henriett Primecz, Hinrich Voss and participants at the Research Seminar Series (organised by the Department of Business, Strategy and Political Sciences, USN School of Business, University of South-Eastern Norway) for kindly providing comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

Funding Open access funding provided by University Of South-Eastern Norway.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors have not disclosed any financial or non-financial interests that are directly or indirectly related to the work submitted for publication. We do not analyse or generate any datasets, because our work proceeds within a theoretical approach

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Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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