17th International Summer School on Social Representations and Communication

Of the

European Ph.D. on Social Representations and Communication

Rome, 08th - 20th July, 2011

The social representation of economic crisis in different social groups

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Introduction

This study, started in 2009, takes part into a wider international research, coordinated by prof. Ida Galli for the "Mediterranean Center for the study of Social Representations (CeMeRS)".

The research has been carried out in four countries (France, Greece, Romania, Italy) and has involved prof. Galli, I. and Fasanelli R. in Italy, prof Bouriche B. in France, prof Geka M. in Greece, prof. Iacob L. & Iacob G. in Romania, prof. Markova in United Kingdom.

Research questions

"State" questions

Allow to describe how a "given state", a determined representation "has come about (causes, strategies) and how this state is maintained (structure)" (Flick, 1998, 51).

- **Do different social groups construct different social representations of the economic crisis?**

- **Which are the differences between SRs of economic crisis produced by different groups in the different cultural contexts taken into account?**

"Generative" questions

Come out during the research process suggesting new lines of investigation (Strauss, 1987).

- **Are the SRec autonomous or in relation with other pre-existing social representations? What kind of relation do they have?**

European and Italian crisis context

- **In Europe it has been considered as the deepest recession since the 1930s, with real GDP projected to shrink by some 4% in 2009, with the sharpest contraction in the history of the European Union.**

- **In Italy in autumn 2009, Bank of Italy announces:**

  - **Recessionary phase (slump of production, income and employment) Italian economy from the second trimester of 2008;**

  - **Considered the most serious crisis since the last most important post-war recession (petrol choc 1974-75);**

  - **Registered slump levels of GDP render it comparable to the «'29 Crisi s»;**

  - **Work market situation, loss of competitiveness, decay of public finances associated to the other Italian structural problems prefigured a long and hard recovery** (at least three years to come back to the previous levels, with dramatic consequences for people)

Theoretical framework: some references

- **1st research question**
- **Different social groups don't articulate in the same way economic or non economic elements (Vergès, 1989; Tyszka, 2001)**
- **To be part of a professional group activate particular social representations (Mardellat, 1994)**
- **2st research question**
- **Different international cross-cultural studies: subjects can have different points of view on economic objects, related to social and economic condition of each country (Zappalà 2001; Vergès & Bastounis, 2001; Vergès, Tyszka, & Vergès, 1994; Dehm & Muller-Peters, 2001; Meier & Kirchler, 1998)**

- **3st research question**

- **Every representation is in relation with an ensemble of other representations which constitute the symbolic and social environment for individuals (Abric, 2001; Brandin, Choulot & Gaffiè, 1998; Valence & Roussiau, 2006, 2009; Jeoffrion, 2009).**

- **A study of SR of financial crisis in relation with social representations of other objects, credit and savings, (Roland-Lévy, Pappalardo Boumelki & Guillet, 2010).**

Relations between different SRsEc
3rd Research aim

Researches done in the structural approach (Abric, 1976) have conducted to establish three types of relations between social representations:

1. **Relation of reciprocity** (Abric and Vergès ,1996): they refer to each other but the central cores of their SR are autonomous because of the different and specific central elements (Guimelli &Rouquette, 2004).

2. **Relation of antinomy** (Guimelli and Rouquette, 2004; Milland 2001,2002): the SR fields are crossed by common themes, that originate their SRs structure, which remains autonomous because of the different specific central element for each central core.

3. **Relation of « emboîtement »** (Vergès, 1992; Abric & Vergès, 1994Representations refer to the same values; normative judgements expressed about the object of SR do not result from its object but from the other SRs objects which it depends on.

    Don't differ each other for anything but the functional dimension of their central core (Abric, 2001).

Relations between different SRsEc (2)
3rd Research aim

- **All the three types of relations identified refer to two dimensions: central/peripherycal and functional/normative**

   Moliner's two-dimensional model (1995)

- **crosses the central/periphery dimension with a descriptive (instrumental, functional) and normative (evaluative) dimension**

TWO-DIMENSIONAL MODEL	Central cognitions	Peripherical cognitions
Descriptive Pole	DEFINITIONS	DESCRIPTIONS
Evalutative Pole	NORMS	EXPECTATIONS

Objectives

- **Three objectives:**

1. Verify how the social representation of economic crisis has been developing within **different social groups**;

2. Identify the differences between social representations of economic crisis in **different cultural contexts**.

3. Investigate if and how social representations of economic crisis have been **developing in relation with other pre-existing social representations** of other economic objects.

Research design

- It has been use both a synchronic and a diachronic approach.

- **Three different phases carachterized by different typologies of survey each:**

1. a descriptive approach, to find out the structure and the content of the SR for every social group in each country;

2. an interpretative approach, to understand social situation in which positions, judgments and behaviors of involved subjects take place;

3. a comparative approach, to underline differences among representations worked out in different cultural contests.

Method

- **A Multi-method approach (de Rosa, 1990; Galli, 2003, 2006)**

- **Different methods and techniques of data analysis**
1. descriptive phase:

- face- to- face interview; Data analysis with Lexical and categorical analysis, Analysis of Hierarchized evocations (supported by Evoc2000 software), Similitude analysis (supported by Evoc2000 software), categorical-frequencial and thematic content analysis (computer-assisted by Atlas.ti software).

2. interpretative phase

- focus groups; categorical-frequencial and thematic content analysis (computer-assisted by Atlas.ti software).

3. comparative phase

- MCA (computer-assisted by SPAD software).

Participants to the research

- In each country involved (France, Italy, Greece and Romania) participants have been selected among three different socio-economic categories, on the basis of their "distance from the object" (Abric, 2001):
    - Shopkeepers,
    - Bank clerks of medium level,
    - University students attending the second/third year at Faculty of Economics.
- 30 subjects for each category (N=90 for each country) Balanced on genre (15 F – 15 M);
- The Data collecting has been conducted on October 2009 in all the countries involved at the same time

Italian sample average age:
- Students   (20,03 – SD = 1,189);
- Bank clerks   (41,97 – SD = 7,595);
- Shopkeepers   (43,23 – SD = 0,833).

Strategies of data collecting

- "As organized systems all representations have two components: content and structure" (Abric, 2003, p. 59).
- A face-to-face interview has been conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire made up ad hoc.

- Structure:
  - Hierarchized evocations
- Content:
  - Semi-directive interview
  - cognitive-evaluative aspects about the structure of the representation (central core and peripheral elements);

  - descriptive-defining aspects of the representation;

  - informative sources and interaction networks;

  - level of involvement/implication and distance from the object;

  - relationship between representation and social practices;

  - perceptions and categorizations (causes, responsibilities, duration/evolution, solutions, positive implications, UE's role).

The Method of Hierarchised Evocation
(Vergès,1992, 1993, 2001)

Every subject is asked to express in two phases:

- **I Phase:**

  Free associations

- **II Phase:**

  Hierarchization

Additions

Evocation of adjectives

Subjects are asked to evocate not the first generic terms they think, but the first five nouns and, in a second moment, the first five adjectives.

Justification for every evocated term

Subject are asked to give reasons for their choices for every term free associated to the inductor.

Techniques of data analysis

- Lexical and categorical analysis;

- Analysis of Hierarchized evocations (supported by *Evoc2000* software);

- Similitude analysis (supported by *Evoc2000* software);

- Categorical-frequencial and thematic content analysis (computer-assisted by *Atlas.ti* software).

Tab. I
Percentages of categorized aggregate for each group of participants
$(x^2 = 26.74; p < .05)$.

	Students	Bank clercks	Shop keepers
Uncertainty about future	-	-	16,7%
It's the Euro's fault	16,7%	-	-
"Households have been the most seriously hit"	-	-	20,0%
References to finance	30,0%	16,7%	-
References to government and institutions	40,0%	26,7%	10,0%
Slump of purchasing power	26,7%	33,3%	56,7%

Students

		Importance	
		< 2.5	**≥ 2.5**
Frequency	**≥ 9**	**Increase of poverty** **Loss of employment**	**Ref. to Government/Institutions** **Ref. to economy** **Ref. to finance** **Negative experience and feelings**
	≥ 6	*Grave*	*Difficult* *Long* *Widespread* *Worldwide*
	>3 < 8	**« It's the Euro's fault! »**	**Bank at the origin** **Crisis of firms** **Insolvency of debts and loans** **Slump of consumption** **Slump of purchasing power** **High cost of living** **To spend less money**
	< 6	*Uneasy* *Disastrous* *Dangerous* *Sad*	*Bad* *Cycling* *Momentary* *Lasting* *Worrying Inevitable*

Bank clerks

		importance	
		< 2.5	**≥ 2.5**
frequency	**≥ 6**	Loss of employment	Increase of poverty Slump of purchasing power Negative experience and feelings Ref. to Government/Institutions
	≥ 6	*Grave* *Worldwide*	*Long*
	>3 < 6	High cost of living	Ref. to economy Ref. to finance Crisis of firms Insolvency of debts and loans Slump of consumption Difficulties (in general) To spend less money
	< 6	*Cruel* *Depressing* *Painful*	*Bad* *Damaging* *Difficult Widespread* *Important Sudden* *Unfair Heavy* *Momentary* *Dangerous*

Shopkeepers

		importance	
		< 2.5	**≥ 2.5**
fréquence	**≥ 7**	**Increase of poverty**	**Ref. to economy** **Loss of employment** **Slump of purchasing power** **To spend less money** **Negative experience and feelings**
	≥ 5	*Expensive*	*Damaging Depressing* *Grave Sad Long* *Worldwide*
	> 3 **< 6**	**"Households have been the most seriously hit"** **Slump of consumption**	**Ref. to Government/Institutions** **Bank at the origin** **Insolvency of debts and loans** **Lack of cash** **High cost of living** **Difficulties in general** **Crisis of firms Unease** **Uncertainty about the future**
	>3 **< 4**	*Impoverishing* *Negative* *Worrying*	*Bad Complex* *Difficult Unequal* *Imposing Putting into debt* *Momentary Stressful Old*

Are social representations of economic crisis differentiated by the three considered social groups?

Students:

Increase of poverty;

Loss of employment

Bank clerks:

Loss of employment

Shopkeepeers:

Increase of poverty

Central cores' overlapping

First Periferies' overlapping

Students
- **Negative experience and feelings**
- **Ref to gov/Institutions**
- **Ref. To economy**
- **Ref. to finance**

Shopkeepers
- **Negative experience and feelings**
- **Ref. To economy**
- **Slump of purchasing power**
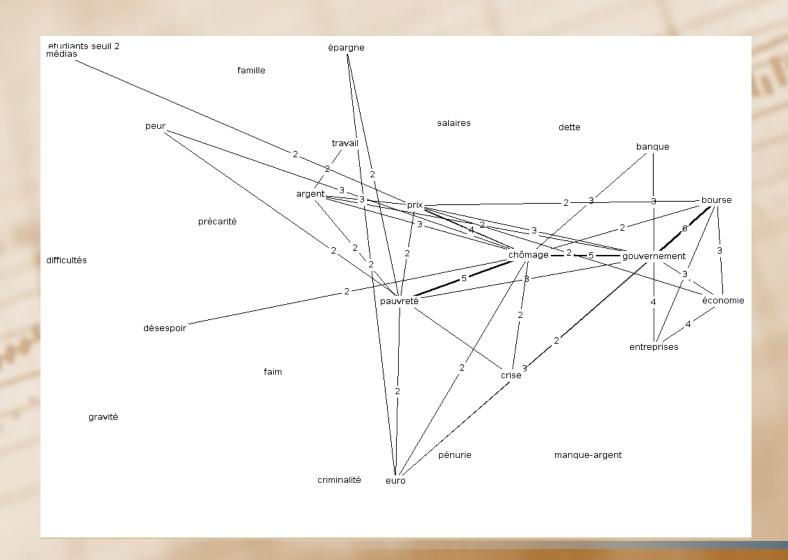- **To spend less**
- **Loss of employment**

Bank clerks
- **Negative experience and feelings**
- **Ref to gov/Institutions**
- **Slump of purchasing power**
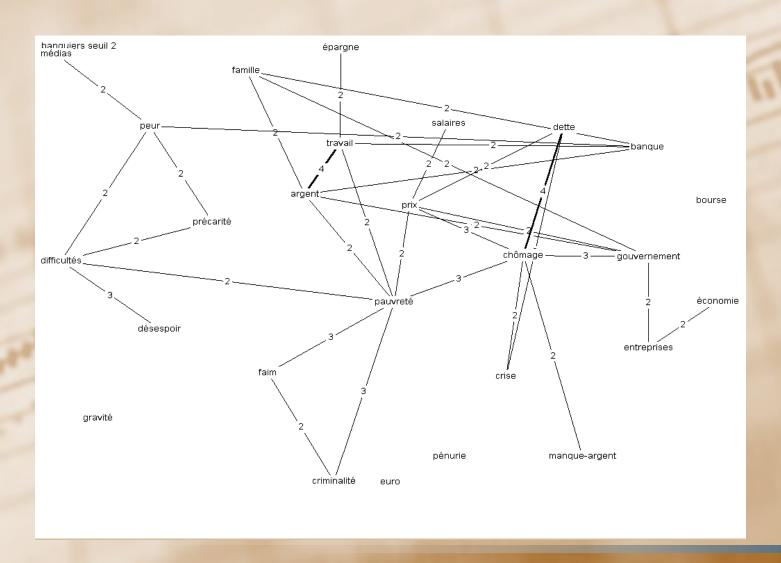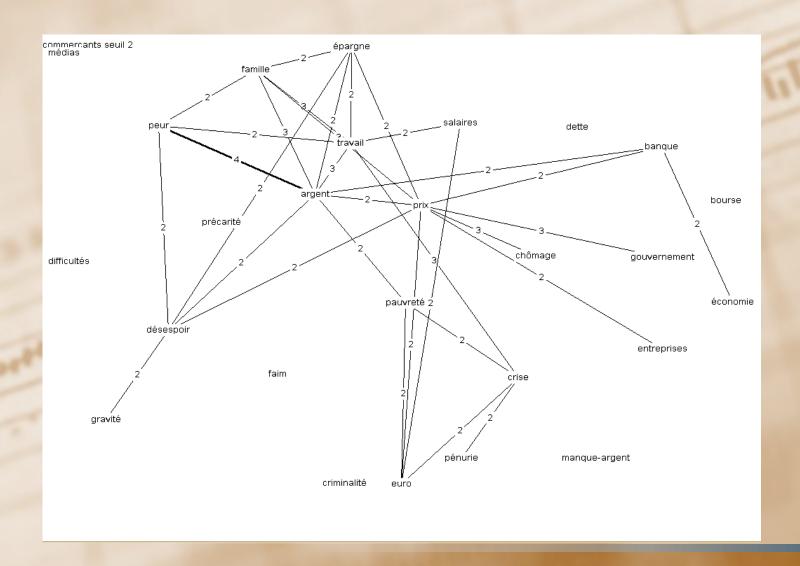- **Increase of poverty**

Contrast elements

Similitude graph. Students

Similitude Graph. Bank clerks

Similitude Graph. Shopkeepers

Moliner's two dimensional model graphical application Nouns	Position in the groups' SREc structure											
	Students				*Bank clerks*				*Shopkeepers*			
Significant elements	N	FP	CZ	SP	N	FP	CZ	SP	N	FP	CZ	SP
Increase of poverty	norms					Expect.			norms			
Loss of employment	norms				norms					Expect.		
Ref. to Gov/Institution		Expect.				Expect.						Expect.
Ref. to economy		Def.						Descr.		Descr.		
Ref. to finance		Def.										
Negative exp.and feelings		Expect.				Expect.				Expect.		
"It's the Euro's fault!"			norms									
Bank (at the origin)				Descr.								Descr.
Crisis of firms								Descr.				Descr.
Insolvency of debts and loans				Expect.				Expect.				Expect.
Slump of consumptions				Descr.				Expect.			Expect.	
Slump of purchasing power				Expect.		Expect.				Expect.		
High cost of living				Descr.			norms					Expect.
To spend less				Descr.				Expect.		Expect.		
Difficulties in general								Expect.				Expect.
"Households have been s. hit"											norms	
Lack of cash												Expect.
Unease												Expect.
Uncertainty about the future												Expect.
Legend	norms			Def.			Descr.			Expect.		

Moliner's two dimensional model graph.app. Adjectives	Position in the groups' SREc structure											
	Students				*Bank clerks*				*Shopkeepers*			
Significant elements	N	FP	CZ	SP	N	FP	CZ	SP	N	FP	CZ	SP
Grave	■				■					▦		
Difficult		▦						▦				▦
Widespread		▦						▦				
Long		|||				|||				|||		
Worldwide		|||			≡					|||		
Uncomfortable			■									
Disastrous			■									
Dangerous			■					▦		▦		
Sad			■							▦		
Bad				▦				▦				▦
Cyclic				|||								
Momentary				▦				▦				▦
Lasting				|||								
Inevitable												
Worrying				▦							■	
Cruel							■					
Depressing							■			▦		
Painful							■					
Damaging								▦		▦		
Important								▦				
Sudden								▦				
Unfair								▦				
Heavy								▦				
Expensive									■			
Negative											■	
Complex												▦
Unequal												▦
Imposing												▦
Impoverishing											■	
Putting into poverty												▦
Stressful												▦
Old												|||

Legend: ■ norms · ≡ definitions · ||| descriptions · ▦ expectations

Final remarks and future developments

First research question: Are social representations of economic crisis differentiated by the three considered social groups?

Possible interpretations:

1. The elements are more or less the same in the overall population, but the meaning is determined by different social insertions: "Agonal" or "critic" social representation (Moscovici 1986):

2. The three representations could be expressions of a unique representation in its transition from "selective" to "connotative" process (Vergès, 2001), because the form of this representation is "constituted from images composed of a series of elements that do not appear to be organised in any specific structure" (p.47).

• *Future developements*

• clarify our first findings using Content analysis and focus groups;

• understand if there could be different social representations originated from groups which are transversal to the three social groups identified with MCA (Multiple Correspondence Analysis).

Final remarks and future developements (3)

Third research question : Are the SRsEc autonomous?
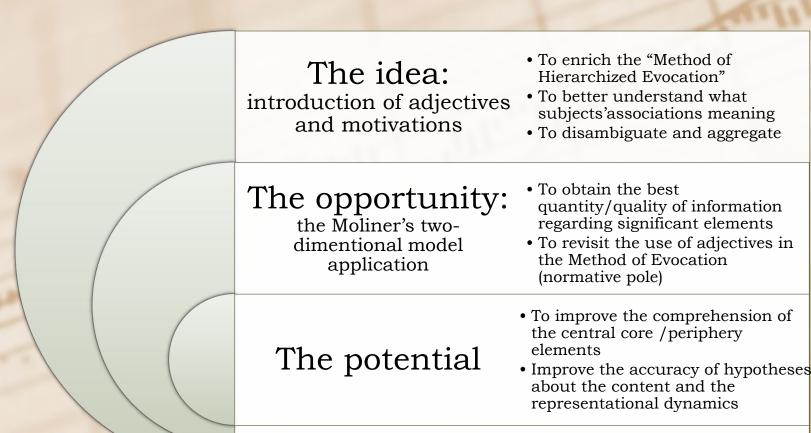
Possible interpretations

- The predominance of evaluations (both among nouns and adjectives) and the lack of a definite structure (similitude analysis) reinforce the idea that the condidered SRsEc elements refer to the same SREc in its **transition from the selection process to the connotative process** (Vergès, 1992, p.433).

- Depending on the central elements' concentration in a central/periphery position of the similitude graph, this representation could be "made up of more than one dimensions which are combined; **the object of the representation is thus formed as a network**" (Vergès, 2001, pp.46-47).

Future developments

- Investigate the relation between social representations of crisis and pre-existing social representations, suggested by our first findings.
- Possibility to insert specific items in the focus group instrument to better investigate this relation.
- A specific methodology could be made up to understand if and how the representational network is articulated.

Conclusion and future developments (4)

A reflection about method

The idea: introduction of adjectives and motivations	• To enrich the "Method of Hierarchized Evocation" • To better understand what subjects'associations meaning • To disambiguate and aggregate
The opportunity: the Moliner's two-dimentional model application	• To obtain the best quantity/quality of information regarding significant elements • To revisit the use of adjectives in the Method of Evocation (normative pole)
The potential	• To improve the comprehension of the central core /periphery elements • Improve the accuracy of hypotheses about the content and the representational dynamics

« THE ECONOMIC CRISES DON'T COME FROM MARS, THEY ARE CAUSED ON OUR PLANET AND THEY ARE PROVOKED BY MEN, BELIEVES, PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONS WHICH HAVE BADLY OPERATED, AND, AS SUCH, THEY CAN BE FACED AND DEMOLISHED BY MEN, BELIEVES, PRACTICES AND MEN, WHICH WILL OPERATE WELL».
(GALIMBERTI, 2009, 129)

Thank you for your attention!