

*Investigating Social
Representations Through
Content Analysis of
Qualitative Sources*

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Why use content analysis for studying social representation?

- Epistemological arguments
- Disciplinary arguments
- Theoretical arguments
- Methodological arguments

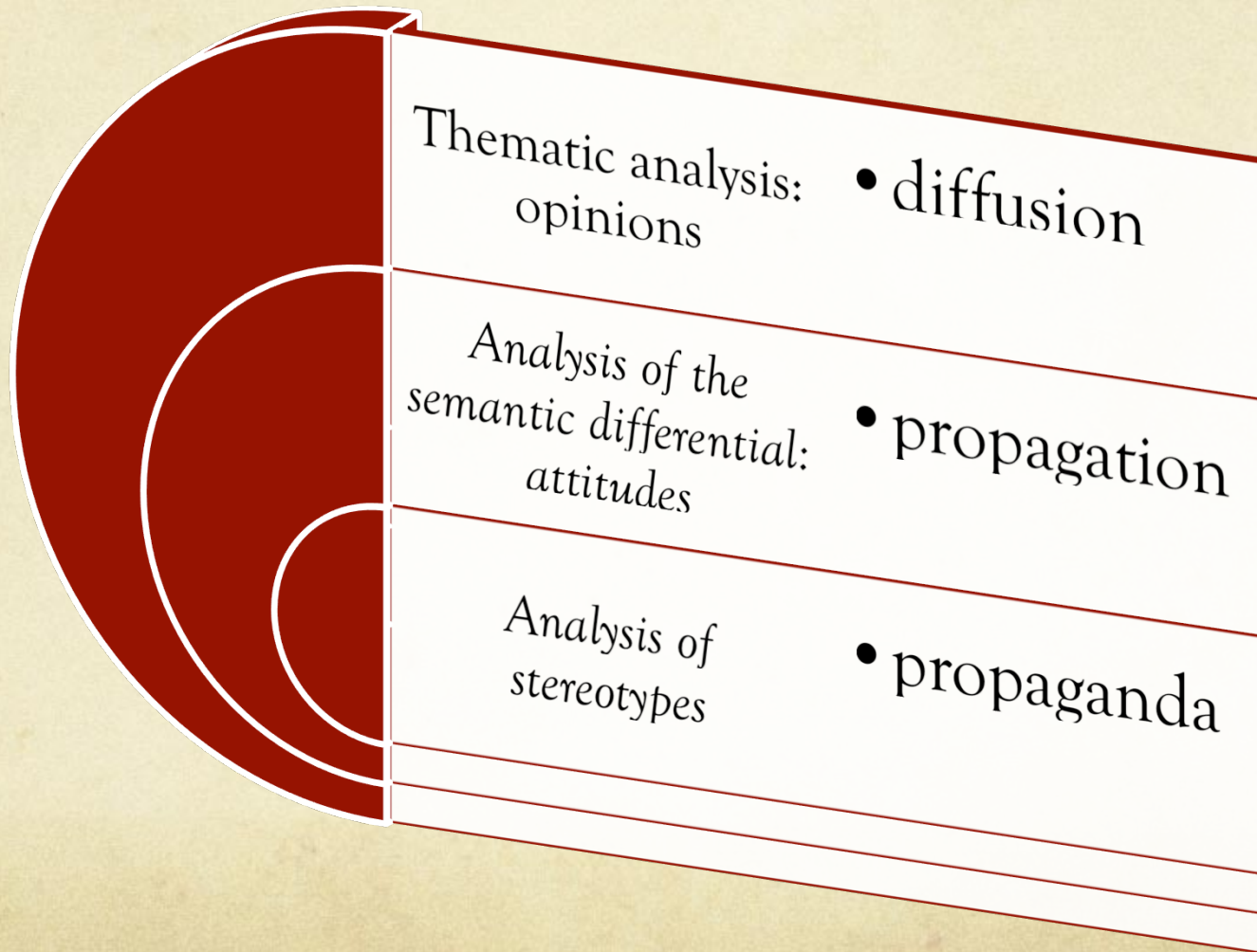
Content analysis and social representation

- Content analysis is "a set of techniques of analysis of communications aiming, through systematic and objective description of the contents of the statements, to obtain indicators (quantitative or not) allowing the inference of knowledge relating to the conditions of production/reception (inferred variables) of these statements" (Bardin, 1977).
- Social representation is used "to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history" (Moscovici, 1973).
- Social representations are "an organized set of object-related cognitions, shared by members of a homogeneous population relative to this object" (Flament, 1994).

Example:

- Research on social representation of depression
- 14 in-depth interviews with young adults (18-30 years old) from Ottawa (Canada) who reported having symptoms of depression last year (diagnosed or not by a health professional)
- Different background: men-women, francophones-anglophones, etc.

Content: Analysis of opinions, attitudes and stereotypes



Content: thematic analysis

- 1. *Mutual exclusion*: the categorization should exclude the possibility for the items to be classified in several categories; categories must be distinctly different and do not admit a semantic intercalation.
- 2 *Uniformity*: the same principle of classification must be used for all categories.
- 3 *Relevance*: created categories should be in accordance with the studied object of representation.
- 4 *Objectivity and fidelity*: categorization should have clearly defined criteria (avoiding the subjectivity of the text or of the operator) and, as such, must be consistent with their principles of constitution.
- 5 *Productivity*: categorization should produce rich results for analysis.

Content: semantic differential

- 1. Choice of the thematic categories to analyze.
- 2. Coding the direction and the intensity of attitudes by at least three researchers, according to the principle of triangulation (Apostolidis, 2003). The coding is done by the interpretation of the meaning of the text (verbatim) linked to the analyzed thematic category. It assigns a positive or negative direction to the specified element. Their intensity is also valued on a scale of 7 points (from -3 to + 3).
- 3. Researchers who did analysis coordinate their evaluation of each element. In the case of differences between the values assigned by the researchers, even after discussion, the average of the ratings will be calculated and assigned to the element.

Example:

- « *In the case of depression, everything is black, you see no light at the end of the tunnel, it is difficult to talk about.* Sometimes they think about suicide, but that is extreme... in my opinion the people who think like that are cowards. I hate that attitude » (O11)
 - Opinions – thematic analysis :
 - 1. *everything is black*
 - 2. *difficult to talk about*
 - 3. *suicide is a cowardice*
 - Attitudes – semantic differential : 1. - 1.8; 2.-0.7; 3.-2.8
 - Stereotype : -2.8

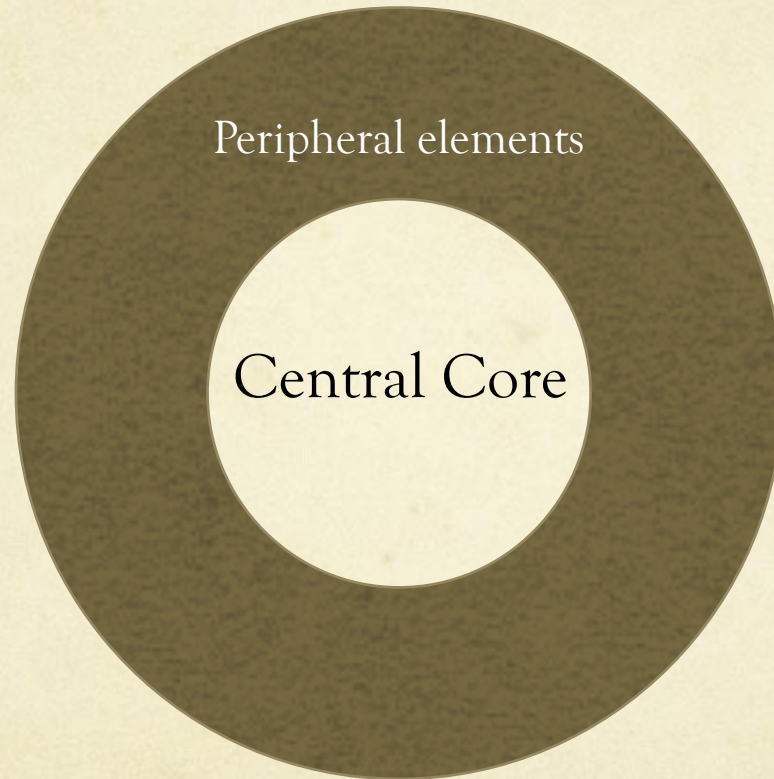
Polarity index of SR

- Polarity index (P) = Nb positive categories - Nb negative categories

Nb total of analysed categories

- The index varies between -1 and + 1: If P is between -1 and -.05, this indicates that most of the categories are evaluated negatively. If P is between -.04 and +.04, it indicates that the positive and negative categories tend to be equal. If P is between +.05 and +1, this indicates that most of the categories are evaluated positively (De Rosa, 1995, p. 107).

Structure: Frequency and Contingency analysis



The frequency analysis

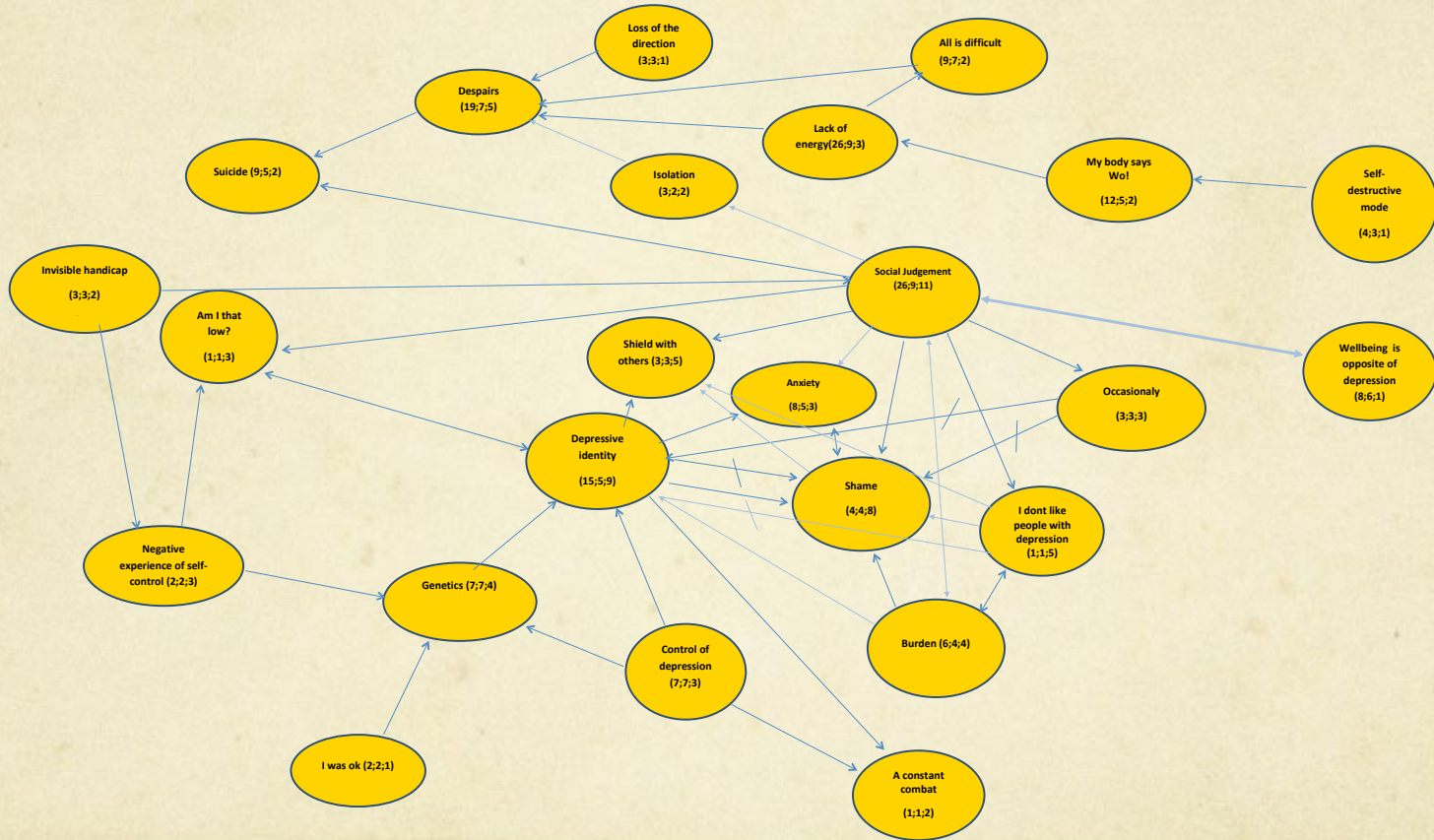
- 1) The frequency of interviews (respondents) where the statement of a thematic category was pronounced;
- 2) The frequency of statements, words and signs of the same thematic category.

Contingency analysis

- Choose the units of analysis (opinions, attitudes or stereotypes);
- Select the unit of context (section or interview);
- Calculate the contingency and create the contingency matrix;
- Assess the co-occurrence between elements for semantic relationships;
- Present the results: significant contingency model (diagram);
- Interpret the results.

Example:

Jugement



Anchoring: natural logics and social background

- The assumption is that the characteristics of individuals can explain the variation of views under the same social representation.
- The analytical procedure is as follows:
 - 1 Establish the logical consistency of different discourses about the object of SR and group them into sets;
 2. Develop and analyze the profile of respondents who have produced these different discourses.

Example:

- Depression is biologically determined: people who use medication
- Depression is determined by negative life experiences: people who consult a psychotherapist and/or tend to discuss their problems with friends, family members, etc.

How may this method be used?

- As an integrated method
- For studying specific dimensions of SR