Social Representations in the 'Social Arena'

'This book is a state-of-the-art showcasing of work in social representations theory, focusing on its application to contemporary social issues. The major thinkers of this approach are included alongside up and coming figures. *Social Representations in the 'Social Arena'* will be of particular interest to psychologists struggling to develop theoretically informed interventions into social life.'
(Brady Wagoner, Associate Professor, Aalborg University, Denmark.)

Social Representations in the 'Social Arena' presents key theoretical issues and extensive empirical research using different theoretical and methodological approaches to consider the value of social representation theory when social representations are examined in real world contexts.

This comprehensive text brings together international experts to explore the relevance of a variety of applications of social representation theory in both institutional and organizational settings, and discusses how social representation theory compares with other constructs of social psychology. Areas covered include:

- justice
- leadership
- health and mental illness
- intergroup relations
- identity
- politics
- environment and tourism
- economics.

This book will appeal to a range of academic researchers and practitioners from a variety of fields who are concerned with the application of social representation theory to various contexts as a heuristic tool for addressing and understanding relevant societal issues faced with 'social demand'.

Annamaria Silvana de Rosa is Professor of Attitudes and Social Representations, and of Psychology of Communication and New Media at the University of Rome 'La Sapienza'. She is the creator and the Scientific Coordinator of the EU-approved European PhD on *Social Representations and Communication* since 1993 and has been leading the EU-approved So.Re.Com. *Thematic Network of Excellence* since 2004.

The series **Cultural Dynamics of Social Representation** is dedicated to bringing the scholarly reader new ways of representing human lives in the contemporary social sciences. It is a part of a new direction – cultural psychology – that has emerged at the intersection of developmental, dynamic and social psychologies, anthropology, education, and sociology. It aims to provide cutting-edge examinations of global social processes, which for every country are becoming increasingly multi-cultural; the world is becoming one 'global village', with the corresponding need to know how different parts of that 'village' function. Therefore, social sciences need new ways of considering how to study human lives in their globalizing contexts. The focus of this series is the social representation of people, communities, and – last but not least —the social sciences themselves.

In this series

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Mathematical Models for Research on Cultural Dynamics: Qualitative Mathematics for the Social Sciences
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Social Representations in the 'Social Arena'

Edited by Annamaria Silvana de Rosa

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Annamaria Silvana de Rosa

The 'content' is not a criterion in itself, however...

When mapping literature and reviewing a field of investigation the use of a criterion based on the thematic 'object of study' is often misleading. When the authors of a thematic review is simply driven by the 'area of study or sub-topics' there is a high risk of them quoting investigations on the same objects but inspired by very different paradigms, let alone the importance of the epistemic principles and theoretical approaches that guide each research's plan and interpretation of results. If the author neglects the different heuristic horizons underlying the concept of society which inspires theories and paradigms, we have already showed years ago how confusing it can be when we assimilate studies on the same thematic object conducted from the social cognition or the social representations perspective, even if both aim at acquiring knowledge of the social world. A chapter entitled '*Thematic Perspectives and Epistemic Principles in Developmental Social Cognition and Social Representations*' (de Rosa 1992) has listed an impressive amount of studies conducted on the same areas or objects, either related to inter-individual relations and intergroup comparisons (i.e. moral judgment, rules and convention, interpersonal perception, interpersonal relations, intelligence and its social definitions, health, illness and death, mental illness, deviance and handicap, sexuality, socio-sexual rules and gender, body, etc.) or to macro social organizations and institutions (i.e. economics, politics, institutions and institutional roles, urban and rural environment, etc.). Besides the thematic affinity between the studies listed in that article, the analysis intended to highlight how different outcomes can be when authors inspired by two different paradigms, namely Social Cognition and Social Representations, carry out empirical investigations on and give theoretical explanations for the same phenomena. We made it clear that both paradigms share a *constructivist* approach to social knowledge (both focus on a subject that actively structures knowledge and is a vehicle of common sense and pre-existing views and informational maps of the world), but in the Social Representations Theory there is a strong integration between constructivism and *interactionism* as epistemic principles. This is clear when we consider the different meanings ascribed to the word 'social':

a   The Social Cognition approach treats the social world in the same way it
    addresses the natural world, as an object of cognitive operations and catego-
    rization, since invariable forms are considered superior to variable contents.
    Therefore, the Social Cognition approach 'by adopting a strictly individual
    type of constructivism which considers cognitive structure as invariable, ends
    up defining social psychology by applying general cognitive psychology to the
    study of social stimuli' (Ugazio 1988: 44);
b   On the contrary, in the Social Representations approach, the 'social' is an
    element that generates knowledge (genesis), orients its goal and functions,
    influences its diffusion and transformation. 'Thus it is not the common object
    or sharing criteria which validate the social nature of representations, but the
    social exchanges that produce them' (de Rosa 1992: 125).

The analysis presented in this chapter is focused on the importance of
different fields of investigation and is rooted into a meta-theoretical analysis
of carefully selected literature strictly inspired by the Social Representation
theory and therefore coherent with the epistemic principles, both constructivist
and interactionist, which inspire the theory beyond the different paradigmatic
approaches (structuralist, socio-dynamic, anthropological, narrative, modelling,
etc.) developed within its general framework.

Once we are sure that we are dealing with a consistent paradigmatic inspiration
of the analysed literature, then the use of thematic criteria to identify the relevance
of different fields of investigation becomes important. In fact, *if the 'content' is not a
criterion in itself, however* …the 'content' in the Social Representation Theory is not
an irrelevant option. In Moscovici's thought the epistemic perspective based on
the Ego–Alter–Object triangle is the revolutionary turn-point for this approach to
social psychology, described as 'systematic' and distant from both 'taxonomic' and
'differential' approaches based on a unidirectional and binary relation between
subject and object:

a   'Taxonomic' social psychology relates an undifferentiated subject to a social
    or non-social object in order to determine the nature of the variables which
    might account for the behaviours of an individual confronted with a stimulus.
    This approach ignores the nature of the subject and it defines 'social' as a
    property of *objects* which are divided into *social* and *non-social*.

                                                                (Moscovici 2000: 106)

b   'Differential' social psychology inversely relates Ego and Object, and the
    characteristics of the individual are analysed to explain observed behaviour.

    On this basis, the nature of the stimulation is of little importance; the main
    preoccupation is to classify individuals by criteria of differentiation which
    often vary according to the school of thought to which the researcher
    belongs or the nature of the problem he is studying. Thus, the subjects
    may be classified in terms of their cognitive styles (e.g. abstract–concrete,

field dependent–field independent), their affective characteristics (e.g. anxious–not anxious, high or low self-esteem), their motivation (e.g. achievement motivation or approval needs) or their attitudes (e.g. ethno-centric or dogmatic) etc. […] Whatever kind of typology is adopted in this perspective, the aim is always the same: to find out how different categories of individuals behave when they are confronted with a problem or with another person.

(Moscovici 2000: 106–7)

c 'Systematic' social psychology focuses interest on the global phenomena which result from the interdependence of several subjects in their relation to a common environment, either physical or social. Here the relationship between Ego and Object is mediated through the intervention of another subject; this relationship becomes a complex triangular one in which each of the terms is fully determined by the other two.

(Moscovici 2000: 107)

Putting the Ego–Object–Alter epistemic triangle at the core of the Social Representation Theory implies a great deal of methodological consequences in research design when choosing and defining the three elements and the approach to empirically investigate their relationship, assuming that there are 'no Social Representations without communication and no communication without representations' (de Rosa 2001b). Therefore a researcher has a great responsibility when choosing a 'topic' and the way to approach it. It also implies that there should be a large amount of ontological coincidences of the object with the 'content' of representation, in favour of a dynamic approach centred on a permanent process of creating, reshaping, transmitting, diffusing Social Representations via communicative social exchanges, shifting the focus from both the static content-oriented description and from the individualistic subject-centred model. Depending on the polemical, consensual or hegemonic character of the Social Representations, the choice of the 'topic' will deal with more or less controversial issues, elaborated by people that position themselves in the symbolic space of discourse expressing the structure of social relations in society. Whatever the choice of the topic will be, for any investigation on Social Representations, it should be relevant from a *societal* perspective and therefore always be anchored to the social and cultural world and its demands: in other terms Social Representations in the 'Social Arena': the theory in contexts faced with 'social demand'.

The dynamic contribution of 'topic' (and its various declinations) in the genesis of Social Representations is so fundamental that an interesting development of the theory elaborated by Moscovici and Vignaux (1994) concerns the transformation of 'themata' (similar to archetypes linked to collective or residual memory) into 'notions' (in the forms of cognitive thematizations: spoken noema, argumentative topoi, commonplaces, examples), into cognitive–cultural 'schemes' that organize situational anchoring in the form of laws (common sense) into 'objectified representations' (applied common sense), 'discursive schematizations',

'argumentative games' and finally 'Social Representations' to be negotiated in the self–other relation, becoming embedded into cultures.

> Themata never reveal themselves clearly: not even part of them is definitively attainable, so much are they intricately interwoven with a certain collective memory inscribed in language, and so much are they composites, like the representations they sustain, at once both cognitive (invariants anchored in our neuro-sensory apparatus and our schemes of action) and cultural (consensual universal of themes objectified by temporalities and histories of the longue durée)
>
> (Moscovici 2000: 182)

The arrows in the figure illustrating the conceptualization of *themata* and its caption '*From themata to social representations*' (Moscovici 2000: 182) or the model presented by Flick in his chart on the '*Forms of knowledge and their relations*' (Flick 1998: 54) objectify a unidirectional transformation pattern. However, if we seriously take into account another fundamental construct of the Social Representation theory, the '*cognitive polyphasia*', we cannot attribute a linear one-way direction to the development of social thinking from 'themata' to 'Social Representations', from 'consensual' to 'reified' universes, from 'collective' to 'social' representations, from 'myth' to 'science', assuming that the second term necessarily replaces the first. On the contrary we need to be open to the fact that a *coexisting model* of the various forms of thought from '*mythos to logos*' (Moscovici 2009: 13) is closer to the epistemology of the complexity of social knowledge systems, than the *replacing model* and empirical evidence has been provided for cognitive polyphasia (de Rosa 2009a; de Rosa and Bocci, Chapter 14 in this book). In any case, the recognition of the importance of memory (individual, social, historical and collective) and its active role in the generation and transmission and reconstruction of social representations is nourished by a rich and interesting literature (Billig 1990; Middleton and Edwards 1990; Jodelet 1992; Páez *et al.* 1992; de Rosa 2006b; Haas and Jodelet 2007).

The choice of the 'object' of study deserves special attention in the investigation of Social Representations ('what kind' of representations and 'of what', 'of whom', 'in which contexts', 'for which purpose' and not only on the 'how' and 'why' of the knowledge as in the Social Cognition approach). The relevance of the choice of the 'object' also inspires the concept of 'nexus' elaborated by Rouquette (1988, 1994) and more recently discussed by other authors (Wolter 2009; Lo Monaco 2009). Here the attention is focused on the affective–cognitive valences of the 'objects' of representations, identifying the 'nexus' with objects with low cognitive elaboration and maximized affective valence, with a great power to inflame masses and mobilize strong and immediate intergroup categorical differentiation. However, we should be prudent in reifying these affective and/or cognitive valences as ontologically embedded in the object, and consider them as part of the dynamic Subject–Object–Other triadic relation, which they depend upon and from which they

are originated and elaborated. The examples given by Wolter (2009) include terms like 'homeland', 'freedom', 'Nazism' among the affective–non cognitive objects (nexus), whereas terms related to other forms of thinking, like scientific or technical thinking (e.g. AIDS for a medical doctor) are considered among cognitive objects, and immediately push us to refocus on the salience of the 'object' for the 'subject' in relation to the 'other': the same medical doctor with a son affected by AIDS will attribute a strong emotional value to the so-called cognitive technical term and the same term can even assume the quality of nexus, if used to stigmatize a specific social group, for example to label a community of homosexuals.

The Subject–Object–Alter triadic relation should always be imagined as occurring 'in a context' determined temporally and spatially, socially regulated by cultural and symbolic referential systems of relations and meanings, where heterogeneous social actors exchange Social Representations emotionally and cognitively mediated by their life experience, their identities, their multiple social roles. Given these implications, " Social Arena" is indeed much more than simply a "context".

The need for a meta-theoretical analysis of the literature on social representations

It is a fact that during the last five decades the Social Representation Theory has become a multicultural, multi-lingual, and multi-generational intellectual enterprise that has spread across all continents. Its vitality and versatility (Allansodottir *et al.* 1993) is demonstrated by its external and internal debate and the growing number of meetings, workshops and International Conferences (Sperber 1989, 1990). The liveliness of the debate on the Social Representation Theory is proportioned to the richness of the dialogue within social sciences (Jodelet 2009) and between the different schools of thought that over the years have emerged sharing its opposition toward the purely positivist–empiricist approach, but distinguishing from it (Harré 1981; Potter and Litton 1985; Jahoda 1988; Ibañez 1992) or within it. These various paradigmatic approaches 'within' the Social Representation Theory – schematically illustrated in the Figure 3.1 below – include:

a   The *Structural Approach* developed by the *Aix-en-Provence School*, inspired by Flament (1981, 1986, 1987) seminal work and diffused starting with Abric's (1976, 1993, 1994, 2003a, 2003b) doctoral thesis and following texts on the structure of Social Representations. Several generations of researchers have contributed to the development of this approach including: Abric and Tafani (2009); Deschamps and Guimelli (2004); Flament (1989, 1994a, 1994b); Guimelli (1988, 1993, 1994); Guimelli and Deschamps (2000); Guimelli and Rouquette (1992); Moliner (1989, 1994a, 1994b, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 2001); Rateau (1995, 2002); Rateau and Moliner (2009), Rateau, *et Al.* (2011); Tafani *et al.* (2002a, 2002b);

b The *Socio-Dynamic Approach*, the so called *Geneva School* – built on Doise's work (1986, 1988, 1992, 1993, 2002, 2005) and including contributions from Doise *et al.* (1992); Staerklé and Clémence (2004); Spini (2005); a recent review of the Geneva School is presented by Emiliani and Palmonari (2009);

c The *Anthropological Approach* – basically inspired by Jodelet's perspective on S.R. (Jodelet 1984, 1989a, 1998b, 2003) and developed by Haas (2002, 2006), Haas and Jodelet (2007), Kalampalikis (2007), or the *Ethnographic Approach* focussed on the analysis of the articulation between *socio*, *onto* and *micro-genesis*, such as in the developmental approach to Social Representations of gender among children studied in their own interactive contexts (Duveen and Lloyd 1990; Lloyd and Duveen 1992);

d The *Narrative Approach*, adopted by authors like Laszlo (2002), Contarello and Volpato (2002), Jovchelovitch (2002) and Purkhardt (2002) among others; this approach is often integrated with the *Dialogical approach* (Markova 2003, 2009) and inspired by *'socio-cultural psychology'*, including among other perspectives the *semeiotic mediational approach* with its complex conceptual map (see Valsiner and Rosa 2007). Sometimes the narrative approach is also articulated with the *rhetorical* (Billig 1990, 1993) or *discursive/conversational research tradition* (Potter and Litton 1985; Parker and Burnan 1993) often disregarding the distinct
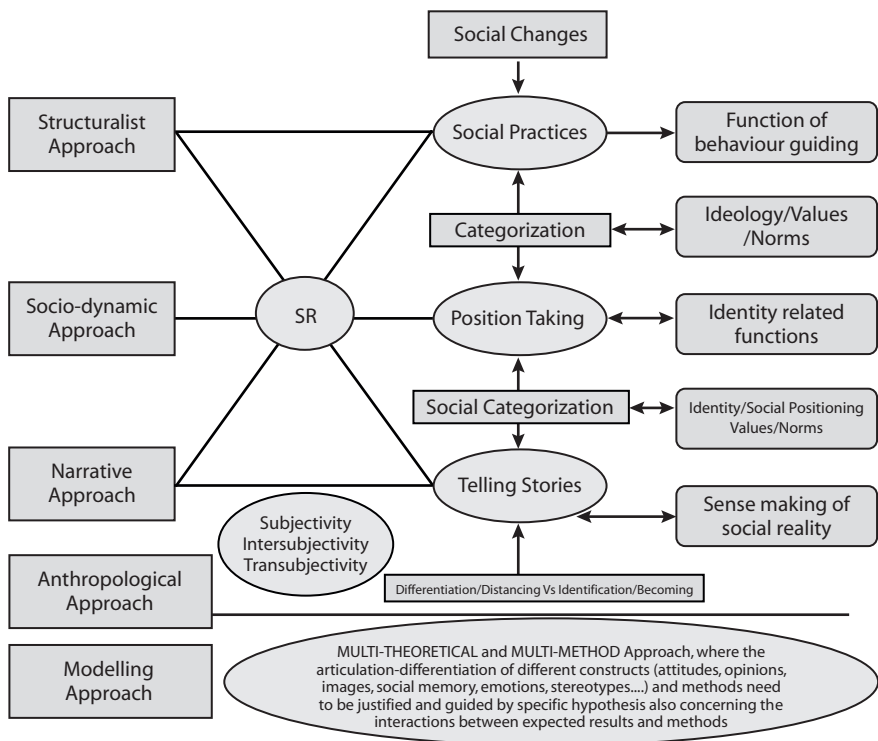

Figure 3.1 Social representation paradigms: one theory, different approaches and methods

epistemological principles inspiring the two paradigms: the Radical Discourse Analysis and the Social Representation Theory (see de Rosa 1994a and 2006c on this controversial debate);

e   The *Modelling Approach* developed by de Rosa (1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2009a, 2012a, 2013a; 2013b; de Rosa and Bocci, 2013; de Rosa and Farr 2001; de Rosa and Mormino 2000, 2002; de Rosa *et al.* 2005) inspired by the integration/differentiation with/from other theoretical constructs and related paradigms (attitude, image, multidimensional identity, social and collective memory, myth, emotions, etc.) justified on the basis of their epistemic principles' compatibility and empirically modelled through multi-methodological approach research designs (de Rosa 1990a; Breakwell and Canter 1993). This approach largely orients the research activity carried out at the European PhD on Social Representations and Communication [S.R. and C.] Research Centre and Multimedia Lab (http:// www.europhd.eu) (de Rosa 2000, 2001a, 2009b, 2012b).

It is necessary to elaborate a systematic review, through a meta-theoretical analysis, of fifty years of research in the sector, in order to answer the following question: Is it possible that the same theory is differently referred to when used by researchers adopting so different approaches or working in different cultural scenarios? If so, what does this mean?

The meta-theoretical analysis of the complete body of literature on Social Representations was launched by de Rosa in 1994, inspired by the goal to provide an organic, comprehensive understanding of the overall development of this theory over time and across continents (see de Rosa 1994b, 2002, 2008; de Rosa and d'Ambrosio 2003, 2008).

Some of the main objectives of this project are to:

- map the theory and its application over time and around the world;
- bring some clarity to the Social Representations galaxy, by analytically reconstructing the complexity of its various theoretical and methodological approaches. In particular by reflecting on the pertinence–coherence between the scientific paradigmatic definition of the problems addressed in the literature inspired by the S.R. theory and methodological operationalizations;
- identify the possible paradigmatic re-definitions operating explicitly or implicitly through recourse to methodological designs modelled on other theoretical constructs (for example prototype, script, schemata, or even more generically social cognition) and therefore inappropriate in a study inspired by the Social Representations theory.

In reviewing the complete body of literature on Social Representations and Communication, the *Open Distant Learning network programme for co-operative international research*, coordinated by de Rosa (2000, 2001a), features an online database.[1]

The development of this scientific project became one of the main outputs of the So.Re.Com THEmatic NETwork of excellence approved by the

European Commission DG-Education and Culture (http://www.europhd.eu/
SoReComTHEmaticNETwork) aimed at producing a *comprehensive bibliographical
web-inventory of the literature* (journal and conference papers, books, special issues,
doctoral and masters theses, unpublished reports) on S.R. and C. and its related
paradigms. It enables searches for all traditional bibliographic information.
Designed by the coordinator of the So.Re.Com THEmatic NETwork, this full
bibliographic inventory in the multidisciplinary field of Social Representations
and Communication aims at acquiring the entire database of literature on
Social Representations and Communication. Via the So.Re.Com THEmatic
NETwork, this co-operative scientific challenge will contribute to a continuous
enrichment of the on-line database, receiving input not only from young research
trainees enrolled in the programme, but the entire scientific community as *users*
and *co-developers* of the database (http://www.europhd.net/cgi-bin/WebObjects/
europhd.woa/wa/biblio).

In recent years, there has been a vast implementation of the *Intelligent Virtual
Library on Social Representation and Communication*, which has been integrated with the
Physical Library specialized on Social Representations at the European Ph.D. on
Social Representations and Communication Research Centre and Multimedia
Lab and linked to the complete bibliographic inventory and meta-analysed
corpus. The virtual Library has also been enriched with an advanced search
engine in the database, using the criteria designed for the meta-analysis grid
(http://www.europhd.net/html/_onda02/06/00.00.00.00.shtml).

The *on-line databases* consist of two different integrated inventories:

a The *first database* contains a *complete bibliographical inventory of the literature* on
   Social Representations and its related paradigm, including *classic bibliographic
   information*. It includes more than 6,700 up-to-date references (January 2011),
   which grew to 6,938 in January 2012.
b The *second database* contains a *meta-analysed inventory* of the literature on Social
   Representations, analysed according to the grid developed by A.S. de Rosa
   (1994b). Its main goal is to develop the *meta-theoretical* analysis of the whole
   body of theoretical and empirical literature of this specialized field. It includes
   more than 2,700 up-to-date articles and book chapters fully meta-analysed
   (January 2011).

The meta-theoretical *grid of analysis* is organized on two levels and may be used
for different purposes and grades of complexity:

1 The first one aims at reviewing literature at a *purely descriptive level* with a
   traditional bibliographic approach. Its aim is to organize information on
   authors and the country in which their institution resides, years of publication,
   whether the publication is a journal or book, language of the publication, type
   of paper (theoretical, empirical). This kind of information is commonly used
   to map the diffusion of the Social Representation theory and its development
   over time and space, in a sort of epidemiology of knowledge.

2   At a more specifically meta-theoretical level of analysis, the grid is organized in five main areas:

- *Theoretical reference to Social Representations constructs* monitors whether a publication refers to *Social Representations Theory* in a very generic way or addresses specific paradigmatic elements of the theory (i.e. the genesis, processes, functions, structure, transmission, and transformation of Social Representations) or whether the contribution refers to the theory itself as an object of critical analysis (meta-theory);
- *Theoretical reference to other constructs and theories* identifies whether the publication refers to other constructs, concepts and theories related to Social Representation as well as the focus of the reference: integration, differentiation, comparison, replacement;
- *Thematic analysis* categorizes the contents of empirical contributions by identifying the general *thematic* areas (i.e. health, environment, etc.) and the *specific object* of each study (i.e. AIDS, pollution, etc.), as well the specific typology (closed, open, polemic) of the *Social Representations*;
- *Methodological profile* of each study (its research design, its location, its nature, instruments for data collection, channels used as source of information, techniques for data analysis) and *Characteristics of the selected population* (size of sample, variables considered, unit of analysis);
- *Paradigmatic coherence* between the theoretical assumptions and the methodological research design.

Snapshots views on thematic areas and fields of investigation in social representations

As described above, thematic analysis is just one of the areas of the meta-theoretical analysis, which can be contextualized in the multi-perspective analysis, looking at the *specific reference to Social Representations constructs*, the *theoretical reference to other constructs and theories,* the *methodological profile,* and more in general the *paradigmatic coherence* between the theoretical assumptions and the methodological research design.

Snapshots from this meta-theoretical analysis of the specialized literature on Social Representations provides systematic results, particularly on the weight journals attribute to empirical and theoretical productions, to the thematic areas investigated, to the prevalence of theoretical and meta-theoretical issues debated among advocates of the theory and/or between advocates and its detractors around particular constructs. Most of those results are beyond the scope of this paper. We will mostly focus on results that can help us highlight the different fields of investigation in the Social Representation literature and the paradigmatic focus of the studies, confirming the main trend of this scientific field to address social demand (see Moscovici 1952, 1961, 1973, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1984c, 1985, 1986a, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1994a and b, 2000, 2001, 2002, and his chapter in this volume).

The meta-theoretical analysis presented in this chapter is based on 2,065 bibliographical sources, including chapters in books (N = 956), articles (N = 936), papers presented at conferences[2] (N = 65), PhD thesis chapters (N = 57), university reports or manuscripts (N = 46) and web documents (N = 5), published from 1952[3] to 2009 by authors coming from different disciplinary, institutional and cultural backgrounds.
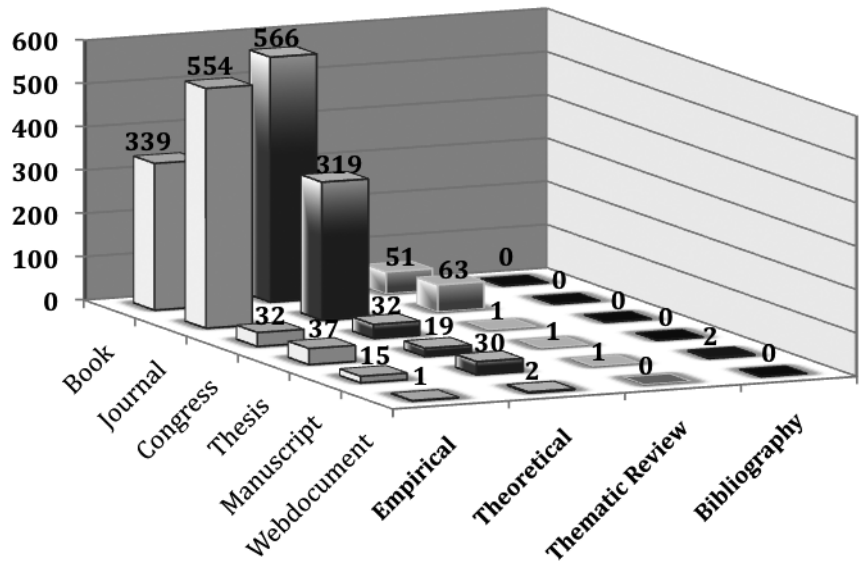
Figure 3.2 Sources for the meta-theoretical analysis according to the types of publication

In book chapters, theoretical contributions are more frequent, whereas papers have an empirical and thematic type of content, and articles published in Journals mostly have an empirical character (see Figure 3.2). Looking more in detail we find an inversely symmetric proportion in sources published in Journals, especially the *Bulletin de Psychologie*, the *Revue Internationale de Psychologie Sociale*, the *European Journal of Social Psychology* and the *British Journal of Social Psychology*, with the only exception of the *Ongoing/Papers on Social Representation* and the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour.*

Confirming the trans-disciplinary interest for the Social Representation theory, it is sufficient to consider that 936 articles have been published between 1976 and 2009 in a wide range of 272 journals belonging to different disciplinary areas such as psychology (including all its domains such as social, developmental, cognitive, clinical, environmental, economic, cultural, personality, industrial and organizational psychology), sociology, anthropology, education, communication studies, marketing, gender studies, medicine (i.e. neurology, psychiatry), jurisprudence and criminology, economy, statesmanship and so on.

In our set of data, most of the contributions were published between 1986 and

1997. This result is highly dependent on the birth year of the specialized journal '*Ongoing Production on S.R.*' (1992), which includes 139 articles (6.7 per cent of the whole corpus), with a progressive increasing trend in publications in the following period (1997 to 2009). Making a balance between theoretical and empirical papers, we find a prevalence of theoretical papers between 1987 and 1996 and a balanced distribution from 1997 to 2009 (see Figure 3.3).
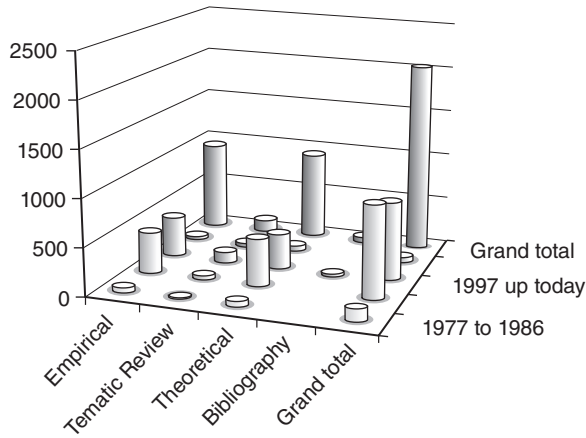
Figure 3.3 Type of paper by year of publication

Relating paper type and language of publication, it is clear that – quite independently from the country to which the author belongs – English and French are preferred for both theoretical and empirical papers (with an inverse preference for the type of the papers according to the language used), whereas empirical papers prevail in articles published both in Spanish and Portuguese and theoretical articles/chapters prevail in books in Italian and German (see Figure 3.4).

Consistently with the aim to highlight the relevance of different fields of investigation in a consistent corpus of the literature on Social Representations, the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (performed by SPAD-N) of data derived from the section '*Thematic Analysis*' highlights a structure based on a clear opposition between 'thematic' and 'theoretical' orientation of the meta-analysed articles/book chapters on the first factor:

- On the negative semi axis we find *empirical articles* published mostly in *Revue Internationale de Psychologie Sociale* (RIPS), the *Bulletin de Psychologie* (BP) and the *European Journal of Social Psychology* (EJSP), characterized by a *thematic orientation* (see Figure 3.5). Studies are mainly focused on thematic areas such as *health–illness* (or on its specific topics like *AIDS* or *mental illness*) or *development–education*, *interpersonal and intergroup relations, gender-developmental differences, intelligence*. The position in the spatial configuration of the active variable '*location of study*' like Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Switzerland and UK with the most
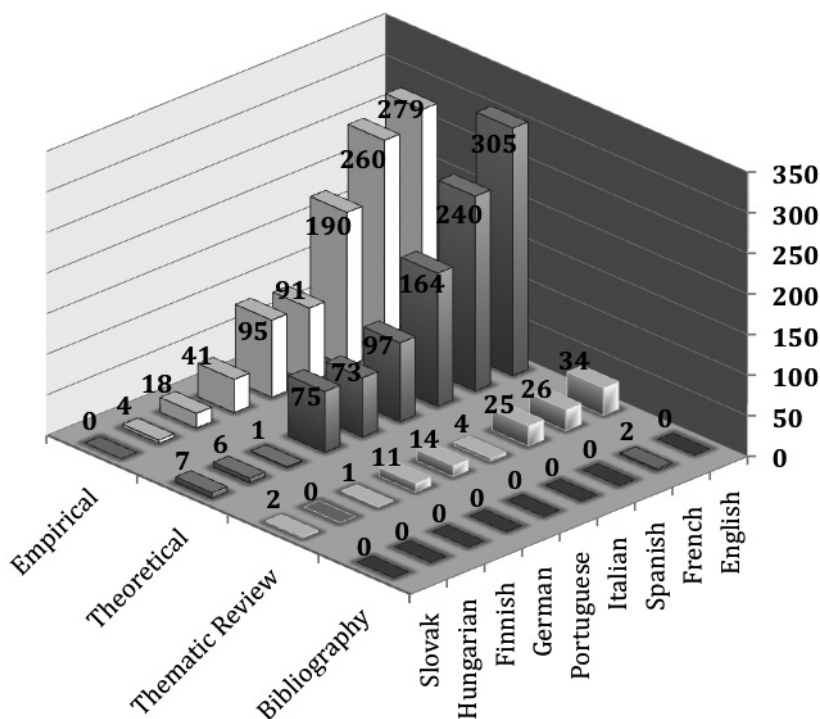
Figure 3.4 Type of paper by language

active contributions provides an idea of the relevance of different thematic areas in different cultural contexts. In terms of the '*geographical area (continents) to which the author's institution belongs*' (used as illustrative variable), the literature produced by European authors included in the source of our meta-analysis is almost positioned at the intersection of the factorial axes expressing both theoretical–meta-theoretical and thematic orientation. On the other hand, there is a slight opposition, described below, between Latin America and North-America, the first being inclined towards a thematic orientation on the negative semi axis, and the second towards the positive semi-axis and in particular close to theoretical reference to *social psychology paradigms and other disciplines* (see Figure 3.6);

• On the positive semi axis we find *theoretical papers*, mainly published in book chapters and in articles on the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* (JTSB), on the *British Journal of Social Psychology, Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale* (CIPS) and on *Papers on Social Representations* (PSR) (see Figure 3.5) dealing with *theoretical and methodological issues*, focused on topics such as: *meta-theoretical and methodological issues* and critical debate around the social representation theory also in relation to *social psychology and other disciplines* (see Figure 3.6).

The second factor opposes:

- A positive semi axis containing topics more related to *interpersonal and intergroup dynamics* and *social identity*, traditionally belonging to the psychosocial research domain, or *mental illness* and *professional practices;*
- On the negative semi axis topics such as *health–illness, intelligence, gender and developmental differences* belonging to several psychological domains, including clinical and developmental psychology, besides community and social psychology.

Moving from a structural approach to a descriptive level of analysis based on the distribution of frequencies related to the categorization of thematic areas, we find that 'theoretical, meta-theoretical and methodological issues' have the highest frequencies (f = 657) and there is a predominant interest in issues related to the 'theory and its relations with other constructs' and to 'social psychology and other disciplines' (f = 310).

In order of relevance, the frequencies related to the fields of investigation refer to the following thematic areas (each of them including several sub-topics): 'health–illness' (f = 303), 'communication and multimedia' (f = 270), 'interpersonal and intergroup relations' (f = 243), 'development and education' (f = 231), 'politics and ideology' (f = 224), 'economics–work–organization' (f = 204). We find lower frequencies for 'identity' (f = 187), 'gender and family roles' (f = 152), 'culture' (f = 133), 'environment' (f = 88) and 'deviance' (f = 67) (see Figure 3.7). In order to understand the wide range of subjects covered by the literature under
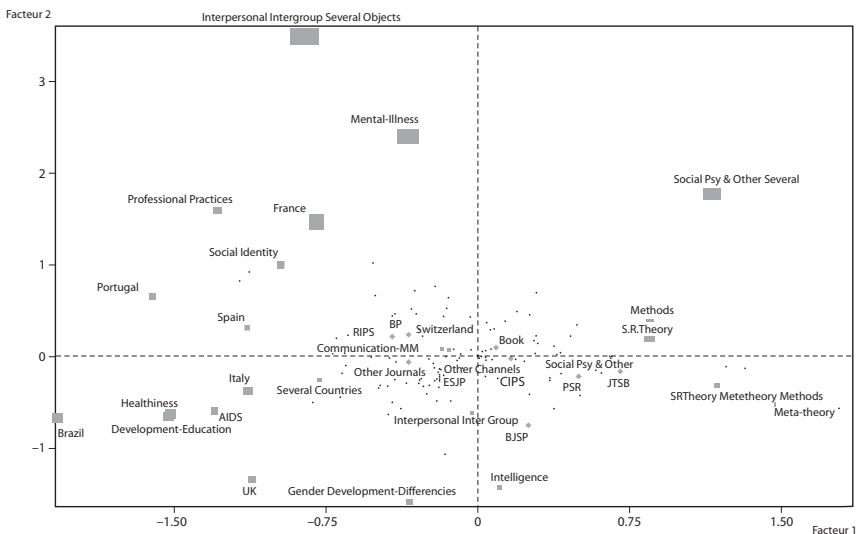
Figure 3.5 First and second factorial axes extracted by the multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) performed with SPAD-N: Thematic areas and location of the study as active variables and book chapters or articles in different journals as illustrative variables
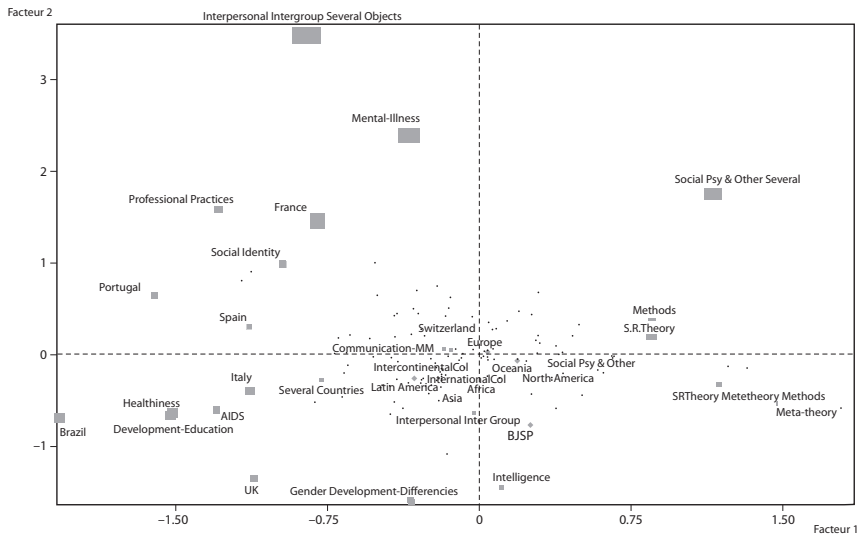
Figure 3.6 First and second factorial axes extracted by the multiple correspondence
analysis (MCA) performed with SPAD-N: Thematic areas and location of
the study as active variables and author's institution country/continents as
illustrative variable

examination, it would be necessary to switch from the analysis of 'thematic
areas' to the analysis of results concerning specific 'topics'. For example, the
literature dealing with Social Representations of economics–work–organization
includes not only contributions of general interest concerning, for example,
the relation between social representations and the concept of organizational
culture (Kummerow and Innes 1994), but also specific topics, that are related to:
consumer behaviour, economic inequalities, representations of economics and
finance, enterprise–firm–brand, financial behaviour, meaning–image of work,
mobility, money and means of payment, organizational culture and change,
pensions, poverty, professional practices–roles, taxes, unemployment, working
hierarchy, etc. It is evident that – due to space limits – we cannot enter in such
details, presenting analytical results for all the specific topics of the thirteen main
thematic areas. However, for the purpose of this contribution it is important to
at least underline that the variety and richness of the topics appearing in the
classification of the sources that have already been meta-analysed, shows the high
relevance of societal issues, which could be afforded by the scientists inspired by
the social representation theory.

Consistently with the analysis based on the abstracts presented at the first eight
editions of the Biannual Conferences on Social Representations (see de Rosa
and d'Ambrosio 2008: 173), the results presented here show that, along with
'theory, meta-theory and methodological issues' and the topic concerning the
place of Social Representation theory within the broad area of 'social psychology

and other disciplines', the most prominent thematic areas include: 'health and illness', 'development and education', 'politics and ideology' and 'economics–work–organizations', resulted among the first group with the highest frequencies. However, in the case of the results based on the Biannual Conferences, the category 'politics and ideology' has obtained a higher percentage (11.6 per cent) than 'development–education' (10.5 per cent) and 'health and illness' (10.2 per cent). Moreover other thematic areas like 'communication and multimedia', 'gender', 'environment', 'identity', 'interpersonal and intergroup relationships', 'culture', 'deviance', 'technology' obtained lower frequencies in the analysis of the Biannual International Conference's abstracts. However the lowest frequency was related to 'social psychology and other disciplines', probably due to the specialized nature of the conference since participants belong mainly to the scientific community of researchers inspired by the Social Representations, compared to the wider and more controversial arena of publications in journals and book chapters, where – due to the larger target of readers – the reference to 'other theories, paradigms of social psychology' seems to be a 'must', given the relevance of the frequencies obtained.
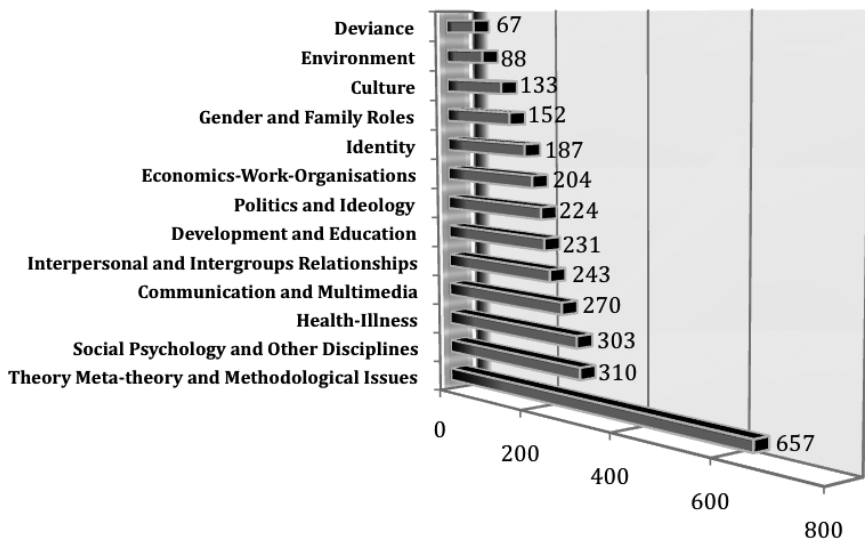
Figure 3.7 Distribution of frequencies according to the variable Thematic Areas

Results showed the highest frequency for 'theoretical, meta-theoretical and methodological issues' over-emphasizing the attention for the critical debate around the Social Representations Theory and assigning a central place to meta-theoretical issues. In order not to give misleading interpretations, we have to clarify that, according to the *Grid for Meta-theoretical Analysis of Social Representations Literature* (de Rosa 1994b), the different thematic areas are not mutually exclusive. So it is possible that a paper concerning for example the Social Representation of mental illness also focuses on interesting and relevant considerations on Social

Representation Theory (SRT) and its relations with other constructs or with other scientific fields, with the important warning that the analyser should underline the overlapping of two or three thematic areas, namely *health–illness*, t*heory, meta-theory and methodological issues* and *Social Psychology and other disciplines*. This kind of logical structure can explain the highest frequency of papers dealing with *meta-theory and methodological issues* and *Social Psychology and other disciplines*. At the same time results show that not only theoretical papers, but also empirical or thematically driven contributions are considered because of their theoretical foundation.

In order to better understand which kind of theoretical constructs authors address, it is necessary to also consider the data derived from the first two sections of the grid analysis, in particular '*Theoretical reference to S.R. Constructs*' and '*Theoretical reference to other constructs and theories and its aim*'.

The results derived from the meta-theoretical analysis related to the first section ('Theoretical reference to S.R. Constructs') show that the core elements of the theory are specifically addressed in the articles under analysis. They demonstrate that the authors who address Social Representation Theory in a *general–generic way* as a label or a definition – i.e. without specifying or arguing about any of its peculiar paradigmatic elements – represent only 21 per cent of contributions under analysis, in contrast with the outcomes of the previous study based on the whole corpus of abstracts presented at the first eight editions of the International Biannual Conferences on Social Representations (de Rosa and d'Ambrosio 2003, 2008) which showed the clear prevalence of *general reference to Social Representations.* Such a difference seems to be consistent with the different nature of contributions. For example those present in journals or books are aimed at systematically focusing on given theoretical issues or research objects, while abstracts of specialized conferences are aimed at disseminating research results for scientific communication.

As far as references to '*paradigmatic aspects of SRT*' are concerned, results show that (see Figure 3.8) researchers' attention is focused on SR '*functions*', which represent the most important paradigmatic reference in our corpus of meta-analysed publications (f = 1113), with particular emphasis on '*orientation and control of social reality*' (f = 160) and on '*guide of behaviour and intergroup relations*' (f = 116). In a certain sense, this is a further confirmation of the societal relevance of the literature inspired by Social Representation Theory, dealing with problems in specific social contexts and embedded in the dynamic of social relations (Di Giacomo 1985). At the same time it is also a confirmation of the fact that the definition of the Social Representation includes its functions.

Behind the functions of SR in social reality, the main area of paradigmatic interest of our authors is the sphere of dynamics and processes of SR. In particular, the emphasis on the '*genesis*' of SR (f = 1058) which is considered in more than half of our scientific corpus under analysis (especially on the 'microgenetic' level: f = 299), and on the '*processes*' of SR (f = 759) shows on one side the influence (direct or indirect, explicit or implicit) of the socio-dynamic approach to SR, in particular scientific contributions of researchers from Geneva (Doise 1989a), and on the other Duveen's genetic approach (Duveen and Lloyd 1990) from Cambridge.

Among the theoretical and paradigmatic aspects of the Social Representation Theory, both 'transformation' (f = 655) and 'transmission' (f = 597) of Social Representations are quite frequently considered by authors, indicating that there is a shared interest for the dynamic nature of Social Representations. In the previous article based on the meta-theoretical analysis of a smaller corpus (de Rosa 2002) the '*transmission*' of S.R. obtained the lowest percentage (data which confirmed the rare interest for studying S.R. in relation to communication: a paradox, if we go back to the seminal study of Moscovici on the diffusion of psychoanalysis in relation to communication systems) so as the interest for '*transformation*', quite surprising since the paradigmatic nature of S.R. is considered as a changing and dynamic form of social thinking. In addition, when attention focuses on '*genesis*', most explanations referred to 'socio-genesis', rather than 'micro-genesis' or 'onto-genesis' and, due to the rare interest for the 'transmission' of S.R. and the related system of communication, in most cases the 'socio-genesis' was just implicit and not investigated (Wagner 1994).

Finally, from the largest corpus of literature here presented (see Figure 3.8), 467 papers take the '*structure*' of the Social Representations into account: among these 49 refer to structure of SR in general, while the others address the Central Nucleus Theory and its development elaborated in Aix-en-Provence (see Abric and Tafani 2009). This distribution of frequencies presents a quite different trend in comparison with previous results based on smaller corpus of data (de Rosa 2002), in which the reference to the SR structure, namely, to the Central Nucleus Theory, was highly regarded, followed by attention to *processes* (an equal number of references are made to '*anchoring*' and '*objectification*') and *functions* (especially the *familiarization*). This comparatively lower consideration of the 'structural' approach to the Social Representations Theory can be partially explained with the increasing popularity of other approaches in the last decade, like the *narrative* approach, sensitive to the strong criticism of radical constructivists (like in 'discursive psychology', which have fascinated part of the community inspired by the Social Representation Theory) getting rid of any residual form of structural approach that evokes cognitivism. In fact, despite its worldwide reputation, criticisms have been addressed to the *structural approach to Social Representations,* stressing the emphasis on methods and epistemic principles still too mentalist and cognitivist. Among others Pareles Quenza proposes that

> most of the assumptions of the structural approach applied to social representations or the central core theory are grounded in traditional conceptions of social cognition and mental representations, which are at variance with the general theory. […] Since the structural approach has remained within a mentalist social cognition paradigm, this paper proposes to move it towards a theory of social cognition that reflects the socio-cultural conditions of creation and transformation of thought, and then emphasizes the communicative and ideological components of social life.
>
> (Pareles Quenza 2005: 77)

Therefore we may comment that the meta-theoretical analysis of this new set of data, based on a bigger corpus of literature including 2,065 articles and book chapters, highlights an evolution, both in theoretical and empirical literature, towards a deeper awareness of its paradigmatic elements.
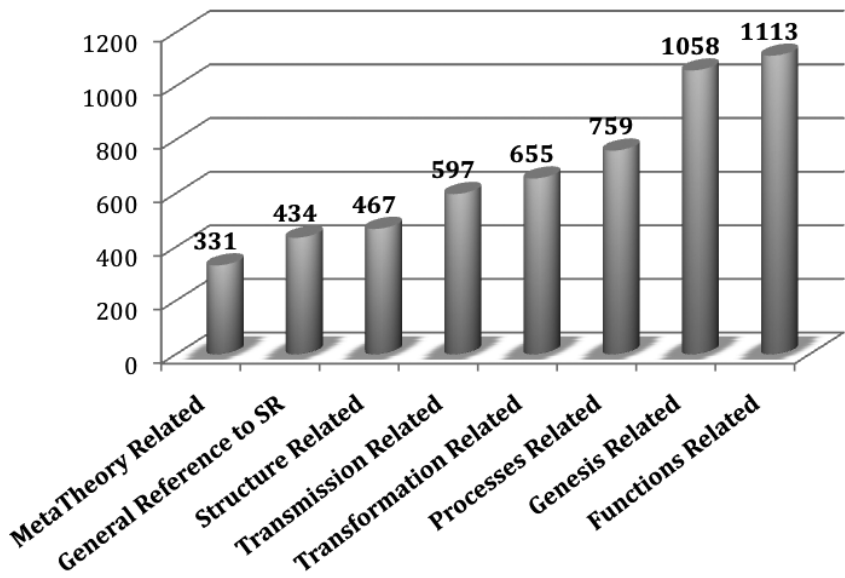
Figure 3.8 Distribution of frequencies according to the variable Paradigmatic Aspects

When we look, in Table 3.1, at the results related to 'theoretical reference to other constructs and theories and its aim (integration; differentiation; comparison; replacement)', the *integrating perspective* adopted by the authors, who refer to other constructs from the viewpoint of the Social Representation Theory, is strongly evident, empirically confirming general statements from authors. For example, as observed by Bauer and Gaskell,

> the synthetic power of social representations theory is evidenced in other areas. For example, in the contemporary literature there are two more or less autonomous fields of study – attitudes and risk perception – each with separate journals and conferences. A researcher might select either one for a conceptual and empirical study of the public's response to new technologies and do so without any need to reference the other approach. However, social representations theory invites us, on occasions, to think at a higher level of abstraction. From such a vantage point 'attitude' and 'risk perception' (along with other concepts such opinion, schemas, ideologies, etc) can be seen as different functions of representations in organising collective action, – specific aspects of the generic concept.
>
> (Bauer and Gaskell 2008: 348)

Table 3.1   Theoretical reference to other constructs and concepts and its aim

Construct	*f*	Integration	Differentiation	Comparison	Replacement	Unspecified
Attitude	857	91.0%	4.3%	2.8%	0.2%	1.7%
Cultural Knowledge	735	94.6%	2.2%	1.8%	0.1%	1.3%
Belief	677	91.9%	3.5%	1.8%	0.0%	2.8%
Cognitive Schemas and Processes	662	90.9%	3.2%	2.6%	0.1%	3.2%
Image	639	93.0%	2.7%	2.3%	0.3%	1.7%
Social Processes	620	94.7%	0.8%	1.1%	0.0%	3.4%
Value	598	94.3%	1.8%	1.3%	0.2%	2.4%
Practice	590	95.2%	1.2%	1.2%	0.2%	2.2%
Behaviour	573	94.9%	2.3%	2.1%	0.2%	0.5%
Opinion	534	92.5%	3.6%	2.2%	0.2%	1.5%
Identity	530	93.8%	2.6%	1.3%	0.0%	2.3%
Communication	523	90.8%	3.2%	2.7%	0.2%	3.1%
Language	434	93.8%	2.1%	2.8%	0.0%	1.3%
Action	432	94.7%	3.0%	1.6%	0.0%	0.7%
Common Sense	412	94.2%	2.2%	1.2%	0.0%	2.4%
Ideology	394	91.4%	3.3%	2.3%	0.0%	3.0%
Norm	392	94.7%	2.0%	0.5%	0.0%	2.8%
Stereotype	382	90.9%	2.6%	3.9%	0.5%	2.1%
Categorization	356	93.3%	1.4%	1.1%	0.0%	4.2%
Symbol	339	96.4%	2.1%	0.9%	0.0%	0.6%
Context	338	95.2%	1.8%	0.6%	0.0%	2.4%
Perception	282	95.0%	1.1%	1.4%	0.4%	2.1%
Emotions and Feeling	264	95.1%	2.7%	1.1%	0.0%	1.1%
Collective Representations	229	83.4%	7.4%	4.8%	0.5%	3.9%
Change	217	97.3%	0.9%	0.9%	0.0%	0.9%
Attribution	206	91.7%	2.9%	2.5%	0.0%	2.9%
Judgment	190	95.8%	1.6%	2.1%	0.0%	0.5%
Self	186	94.1%	2.7%	1.6%	0.0%	1.6%
Development	136	97.1%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	2.2%
Consensus	124	94.4%	1.6%	0.8%	0.0%	3.2%
Prototype	124	94.4%	2.4%	0.8%	0.0%	2.4%
Prejudice	109	89.9%	2.8%	1.8%	0.0%	5.5%
Individual Representations	107	83.2%	7.4%	4.7%	0.0%	4.7%
Myth	106	91.5%	4.7%	1.9%	0.0%	1.9%
Social memory	100	95.0%	1.0%	3.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Motivation	79	97.5%	2.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Metaphor	58	94.8%	5.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Themata	52	94.2%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
Stigma	50	98.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Assimilation	45	95.6%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Habitus	28	89.2%	3.6%	3.6%	0.0%	3.6%
Cognitive Representations	22	81.9%	4.5%	9.1%	4.5%	0.0%
Archetype	20	95.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Cognemes	20	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Projection	16	93.8%	6.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Coping	14	85.8%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	7.1%
Locus of Control	9	88.9%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Semiotic Triangle	5	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

* Totals of the percentage raws are 100

The unifying power of this theory, defined by Doise (1988) as a *grande théorie* – capable of articulating dimensions, constructs and concepts, and even multi-disciplinary views – or by Kalampalikis and Haas (2008) as '*more than a theory: a new map of social thought*', is very impressive, compared to micro-paradigmatic narrow approaches or constructs, like for example those of prototype, schema, script, and some 'other lonely paradigms' belonging to the cognitivist tradition (Moscovici 1984b). From this integrative power the theory gains a great degree of innovation. Borrowing the expression from Tarde's essay on art (1893), Denise Jodelet (2008: 411) has recently defined the Social Representation theory as a '*beautiful invention*', reserved for an idea that can lead to the discovery of more ideas, and for an invention that is fruitful to future inventions. Moscovici's 'oeuvre' has never been a project for pure imitative repetition or replication as it is often the case in psychology. His work proposes itself as an impulse to open 'new avenues of discovery'.

The tendency towards integration is not in contrast with the need to clearly differentiate Social Representations from other constructs and theories, or to elaborate arguments for integrating some aspects and differentiating others (see for example, the distinctive analysis provided by de Rosa in 1992 with respect to social cognition or in 2008 with respect to radical discourse analysis).

If we consider in Table 3.1 the twelve constructs that the authors of our scientific corpus have most frequently addressed (N = higher than 500), we realize that they recall the main approaches in social psychology: classical constructs transversal to several paradigmatic traditions (attitude, opinion, image, behaviour), the socio-cognitive perspective (cognitive schemas and processes), the socio-cultural and interactionist perspective (cultural knowledge, belief, social processes, values, practices, identities, communication). This result accounts for the unifying value of the Social Representation Theory, which is not a new label for an old concept or a new word to add to a glossary or a new tool that enriches a methodological arsenal, but a new vision of the discipline and the articulation of its constructs.

> The Theory of Social Representation and Communication touches the main phenomena of the field of social psychology. Therefore I consider the theory of Social Representations to be a theory unifying the field of social psychology […] moving towards a solution of its problem of unification. I am convinced, on conceptual grounds, that it is the only theory which today can unify our highly fragmented discipline, which has reduced the humanity of individuals and social groups into something abstract, stereotyped and minimal.
>
> (Moscovici 2000: 286)

Therefore it is not surprising that a classical construct like *attitude* is frequently addressed in the literature on Social Representations (f = 857). This data affirms the centrality of the relation between *social representation* and *attitude* among other concepts and constructs, which has been discussed from different perspectives in critical reviews (de Rosa 1993; Doise 1989b; Fraser 1994; Farr 1994; Howarth

2006; Jaspars and Fraser 1984; Palmonari 1989; Pukhardt 1993; among others). Some of these authors, like Farr and Howarth, clearly affirm an epistemological incompatibility *between* the individualized construct of attitude and Social Representations, given that 'there is an epistemological incompatibility *within* the tradition of research on attitudes between the "view of the world" approach to their study which is associated with gestalt psychology and the "consistency of response" approach associated with behaviourism' (Farr 1994: 3) and 'it is the different conceptions of the individual–society interface that make the concepts of attitudes and social representations incompatible' (Howarth 2006: 698). From another perspective (more focused on the construct of attitude, as evaluative dimension, rather than on the different theories from behaviourist to cognitivist approaches which have progressively individualized its application), some other authors, like Doise, Palmonari and de Rosa, prefer to position the two concepts at a different level, generally recognizing a supra-ordered level to Social Representation compared to the sub-dimensional attitude. Moscovici has given a definitive answer:

> Frankly, I do not know why the concept of attitude is opposed to that of Social Representation, since it is one of its dimensions. Neither do I understand how one can replace one concept with the other when one proposes to study the genesis of common sense.
>
> (Moscovici 2000: 234)

We may finally agree that attitude corresponds to the *evaluative dimension* of the social representation, contributing to polarize positively, negatively or neutrally the semantic field of the represented objects.

Contrary to this integrative tendency of researchers inspired by the Social Representation Theory in referring to the concept of attitude, there is complete silence towards the construct of Social Representation in most of the handbooks on attitudes, especially if published in the US. To cite just one example out of many: in the handbook *The psychology of attitudes* published in 1993 by Eagly and Chaiken (1993, see also 1998) more than thirty years after the publication of Moscovici's book on psychoanalysis (1961), the Social Representation Theory is not mentioned once in 794 pages, although the founder of the theory is quoted in several parts of the volume and twelve bibliographic references to his work are included. All these references and quotations are related exclusively to the Minority Influence Theory, which has been allowed to penetrate into the scientific community of social psychologists in the U.S.A., due to its experimental tradition of research and its focus on processes, whereas the theory of Social Representations – mainly oriented towards field researches that investigate the symbolic system of everyday knowledge as it is produced, reproduced and diffused by social groups and media in the context of ordinary life – has been quite completely denied by the orthodox US social psychology.

The proposal advanced by Jost and Kruglanski (2002: 169) 'for reconciling the goals, values, and insights of social constructionism with the methods and

strategies of inquiry practiced within experimental social psychology' from one side has assimilated under the umbrella of social constructionism many distinct theoretical paradigms, from the other side has not influenced at all the individualistic and cognitivist mainstream of the US social psychology. Even in the comprehensive table of contents of the new version of the classic text, *Social Cognition*, published in 2007 by Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor with the attractive sub-title *From Brain to Culture*, highlighting the cutting-edge research in social neuropsychology, mainstream experimental social-cognitive psychology and cultural psychology, there is no room for Social Representation theory. Same fate with regards to Petty and Briñol's chapter on *Attitude Structure and Change* (in Gawronski and Payne 2010). The general oblivion of the Social Representation theory in the US handbooks of social psychology is even more puzzling after the publication in 1984 of Farr and Moscovici's edited volume on '*Social Representations*' and in 2001 of Kay Deaux and Gina Philogène's book '*Representations of the Social: Bridging Theoretical Traditions*', following the organization of the historical 1st International Social Representations Conference in U.S.A., held in New York on 9–10 October 1998, attended by the US social psychologists' pantheon and the European scholars among the most representatives working in the field of Social Representation, including the founder of the theory.

It is not by chance that the notable exception of early reference to the Social Representation Theory, although very briefly presented in two pages (pp. 285–7) among five distinct approaches to social psychology defined as 'postmodern' (ethogenics, social constructionism, social representations, discourse analysis and critical social psychology) appears in the book entitled '*Currents of Thought in American Social Psychology*' published in 1991 by Gary Collier, Henry Minton and Graham Reynolds, three university professors from Canada (a country where the theory of Social Representation has largely penetrated, also thanks to the linguistic links with the French culture). Interested in the Americanization of the French social theory (Collier *et al.* 1993; see also Moscovici and Markova 2006), the authors carry out

> a historical analysis of the development of American social psychology in order to provide an understanding of how the discipline has been shaped by internal developments, such as theory, concepts, professionalization, ad research procedures, as well as external social forces – that is, the political, economic, ideological, cultural, and intellectual facets of American society.
> (Collier *et al.* 1991: VII)

In so doing, they were committed to reply to a central question: 'Why, out of all the possible topics that could legitimately be considered part of social psychology, had American social psychologists selected the ones they did?' (Collier *et al.* 1991: VII). This question is at the core of our meta-theoretical analysis with regard to the analysis of diffusion and resistance to the social representation theory in different cultural contexts and over the time.

Hopefully the diffusion of the English translation (2008) of Moscovici's seminal

work *Psychoanalysis Its Image and Its Public*, appeared as first edition in France almost fifty years ago (1961, second revised edition in 1976) will contribute to remove some barriers for the penetration of the Social Representation theory among the monolingual English-speaking scientific community of social psychologists, according to the auspices expressed by Charles Smith (2008) in the Editor's note to the Special Issue dedicated to this cultural event by the *Journal for theory of Social Behaviour*, offering his readers 'a highly informative and enjoyable intellectual journey'.

What is impressive in the results of our meta-theoretical analysis of the literature on Social Representations is the variety of constructs and paradigms they belong to, from classical to cognitivist, sociocultural and interactionist, only at first glance in contrast with each other.

Performing a multiple correspondence analysis via Spad-N (using 'constructs' as active variables and the geographical location of the author's institution and the period of publication and the type of publication as illustrative variables: see Figure 3.9), a structural organization of the literature under analysis shows a clear theoretical differentiation:

- The first factor opposes papers that address Social representations in a general–generic way (positioning Africa and Asia as geographical location of the author's institution) to papers specifically addressing Social Representations and other psycho-social constructs;
- The second factor represents the opposition of the papers addressing classical constructs of social psychology (like attitude, opinion, behaviour, identity, norms, motivation, perception, social processes, change) and linked to cognitive processes (categorization, assimilation) or constructs (cognitive schemas, prototype, stereotypes, judgment, prejudice, stigma) to those that we can ascribe to interactionist (communication, language, practice, action, consensus, emotions) and socio-cultural approaches to social psychology (common sense, symbol, collective representations, myth, metaphor, individual representation, social memory, themata). The list in the table of descriptive statistics is of course much longer; however the graph based on the multiple correspondence analysis only shows the active variables that contribute to the factor.

Regarding this second factor, we can point out some interesting trends:

a A shift from the literature produced between 1976 and 1996 (anchored more into individualistic and classical constructs), positioned on the positive semi-axis, to the literature published after 1997 (focused more on socio-cultural and interactionist constructs) positioned on the negative semi-axis;

b The emergence of a differentiation between the literature produced in the Northern America context (namely Canada and US) – more anchored to traditional and cognitive paradigms and constructs – and the Latin American literature produced by authors which instead fit with interactionist and

socio-cultural paradigms and constructs, whereas the European literature sets itself very close to the intersection of factors.

These two points suggest some considerations concerning the development of the Social Representation Theory over time and across continents: the theory was officially born in France (Europe) in 1961, became popular worldwide (although in some continents, like Africa and Asia it is still scarcely developed and often approached in a general–generic way). Its diffusion around the world has rooted it into the cultural background of social researchers, lending it to different interpretations and applications. Over time and during such a journey (especially with its large dissemination in Latin America) the literature inspired by the Social Representations theory grew by contrast with both the behaviourist and cognitivist paradigms, widely diffused in the North American psycho-social tradition, giving much more space to socio-interactionist and socio-cultural perspectives. European literature shows a balance between these two tendencies, trying to articulate the Social Representation Theory in the large psycho-social theoretical panorama, by developing its own various (structural, socio-dynamic, anthropological, ethnographic, narrative, dialogical, modelling) approaches as indicated above.
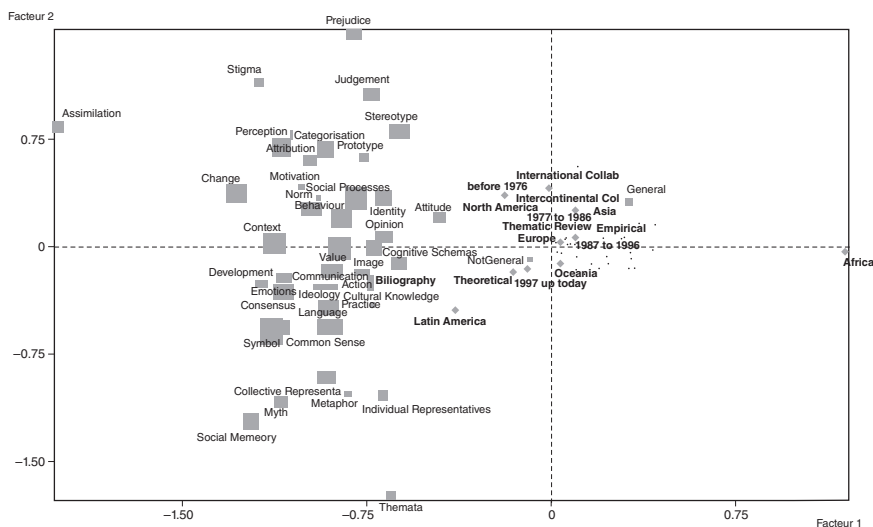
Figure 3.9 First and second factorial axes extracted by the multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) performed with SPAD-N: Constructs as active variable and Type of publication, Year of publication, Author's institution country/ continents as illustrative variable

We have finally reached the core of the meta-theoretical analysis. It aims at:

- Reflecting on the pertinence–coherence between the scientific paradigmatic formulation definition of the problem addressed in the literature inspired by the S.R. theory and the methodological operationalization;

● Identifying the possible paradigmatic re-definitions operating explicitly or implicitly through recourse to inappropriate methodological designs (because they were modelled on other theoretical constructs).

The results obtained from the meta-theoretical analysis of the literature according to the 'methodological profile' and 'characteristics of population' sections of the grid may be interesting to highlight some critical points.

Compared to previous results published in the past (de Rosa 2002), the sterile opposition between qualitative and quantitative approaches will be overcome (Le Bouedec 1984; Flick 1992, 1993; Farr 1993; Spink 1993; Gaskell 1994; Jodelet 2003), in agreement with the multi-method approach recommended by de Rosa 'as a theory of method' (1990b, 2002), Sotirakopoulou and Breakwell (1992), and encouraged by Moscovici's tolerant attitude, who never exchanged the means for the end: 'Methods are only means towards an end. If they become an end or a criterion of the selection of topics and ideas, then they are just another form of professional censorship' (Moscovici 2000: 268; see also Moscovici 1986b; Moscovici and Buschini 2003).

Even if, among the 978 empirical papers under analysis, on field (80.2 per cent), descriptive (56.34 per cent) or quasi-experimental (39.4 per cent) researches are widely prevalent compared to experimental researches (4.3 per cent) carried out in laboratories (5.6 per cent). When we take the tools for data collection into account we realize that a more integrated approach in investigating Social Representations is pursued in a number of studies adopting different tools for data collection. Among these 978 empirical papers, excluding 209 papers missing such kind of information, namely, we notice how between structured instruments (f = 397) on the one hand, and open instruments (f = 524), the figurative (54) and the observant techniques (f = 59), on the other hand, there is an overlapping of 265 papers integrating different methodologies.

This result shows an evolution in terms of progressive integration between quantitative and qualitative approaches, compared to the results of a previous publication (de Rosa 2002), where old antinomies between methodological options still appeared in the literature on S.R., despite the repeated invitations of its founder to overcome the sterility of this opposition.

Finally a comment should be made on data referring to the characteristics of the population studied in the empirical investigation on S.R. Consistently with the previous study (de Rosa 2002), the *sample's numerousness*, as resulting from both stages of our meta-theoretical analysis, is frequently between 101 and 250 and on more than 500 participants rather than between 51 and 100 (typical range in most social research investigations published in specialized journals of social psychology): the result is probably due to the field nature – rather than laboratory – of most studies and a tendency towards a sociological perspective, rather than an individualistic psychological perspective.

The population's variables are commonly age, sex, education and target group category (such as professional membership, or smokers–non-smokers, etc.); social class seems to have lost its centrality and popularity in the empirical

investigation on S.R. in favour of more integrated indicator of education and professional role, similarly to a more general trend in social psychology and in sociology.

It is also interesting to consider the *unit of analysis* of the studies. Despite a wide number of investigations (f = 301) refer to *'groups'* (f = 247) or *'culture'* (f = 54), we still find the highest number of investigations referring to *'individuals'* without any social positioning (f = 313). *From a* critical meta-theoretical perspective, this result has often been used as critical argument against the Social Representation research practice denouncing the lack of consistency between the paradigmatic theoretical assumption of the *socially shared* nature of Social Representations and the individualistic methodological operationalization. As counter argument some of the scientists inspired by the Social Representation theory oppose that even in a single individual it is possible to retrace social and even collective representations, since the social thinking is social in its genesis, contents and functions and not necessarily for the numerical extension of its sharers: thus their social nature would not justify the opposition between individuals and society (Giust-Desprairies 1988; Duveen 2007).

A final note

The main results derived from the meta-theoretical analysis of the literature above presented offer a snapshot view of the current status of the field, as an interface between the purely theoretical chapters included in the first part of this book (Chapters 1 and 2) and the theoretical and empirical contributions included in second and third parts:

- Those presented in the second part offer a variety of approaches inspired by the Social Representation theory developed to investigate diverse social topics in several thematic areas,
- The chapters included in the third part of this book present a *modelling approach* to social representations, investigating multiple research objects chosen among many others (madness and mental illness, place-identity and European historical capitals) in different thematic areas (health and community psychology, socio-environmental and tourism psychology) through a unified theoretical and meta-theoretical view of the social representation and multi-method research designs, guided by specific hypotheses of the interaction between the dimensions under investigation and the tools designed to study them, in accordance with the theory of the methods that have been developed, depending on their projective or structured nature, their verbal, textual or figurative channels, the strategies of data analysis, etc.

Notes

1   The data is inserted by a lab assistant among young researchers, doctoral research trainees and post-graduates via the website, which is updated periodically after a

double quality control and validation by an authoritative source under the supervision of the designer and producer of the inventory. A research team coordinator is fully dedicated to the project acting as an intermediate quality control filter, checking if bibliographical references are formally correct, canceling unrelated references, and coordinating the work of the research trainees. This means, for example, changing the status of each reference 'submitted' as proposal into 'assigned' reference to be analysed. The scientific coordinator, responsible for the management of the whole project and its necessary technical and human resources, is accountable for the full quality control of the meta-theoretical analysis. This means, for example, controlling if the contents of the publications have been interpreted correctly, filling in the grid of meta-analysis.

   In order to maintain the responsibility and quality control of every new entry, the research team coordinator and the scientific coordinator have a personalized 'password' and 'identification code' to have access to the system, with a different degree of freedom: to consult information, to change information, to change the reference status from submitted to assigned, to validated, to delete information, etc.

2   The results of the meta-theoretical analysis of a specific corpus of sources based on 1629 abstracts presented at the eight editions of the Biannual International Conferences on Social Representations have been published elsewhere (de Rosa and d'Ambrosio 2008).

3   Although the official birth year of the theory is usually 1961, the year of publication of the seminal work *La Psychanalyse: son image et son public*, our data base also includes an even earlier publication concerning a partial publication of results based on Moscovici's doctoral thesis (Moscovici 1952). I have elsewhere (de Rosa, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012c, in press) examined the embryogenetic period of the theory of social representations in light of Moscovici's publications between 1952 and 1961 and its prospective developments in the era of Facebook after an half century of its development.

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