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The methodological polytheism in the Social Representations literature and its implication in the contemporary communication era: distinctiveness and dialogue between multiple research methods (textual and image-based research sources and tools, traditional and new media-based research design, experimental and field oriented studies)



European / International Joint Ph.D. in  
**Social Representation and Communication**

# Dialogical and Narrative Approaches and their research methodology

*Maryia Kukharava*

*enrolled in the 3rd year of the SoreCom Joint-IDP*

*European/International Joint Ph.D. in S.R. & C. - Sapienza University of Rome (Italy)*

# THE DIALOGICAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The **Dialogical approach to Social Representations** is inspired by the number of representative experts in this scientific field, **Ivana Markova** (2003, 2007, etc) and elaborated by **Grossen** (2002), **Liu** (2004), and others.

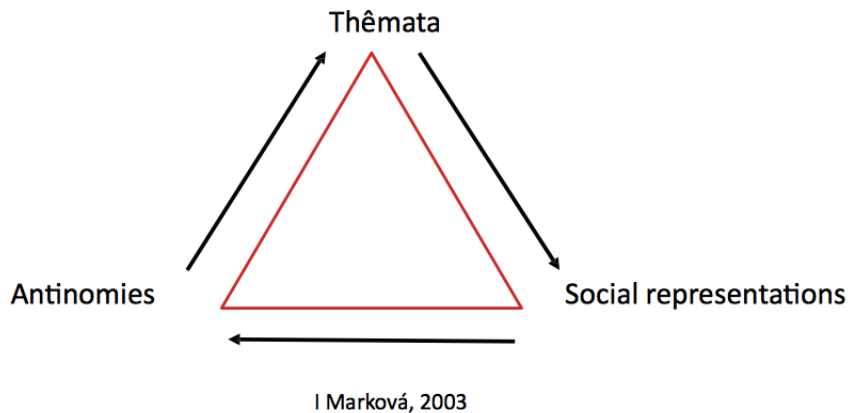
What is specific to this approach is the idea that one can hardly discuss social representations and culture without stressing the role of **language, communication** and, more precisely, **dialogicality**, as a central feature of the relation between social representations and culture (Markova, 2003; Valsiner, 2003)

**Dialogicality** is the capacity of the human mind to conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of, or in opposition to, otherness.

Like the dialogue, SRT is **social, heterogeneous, and dynamic**.

# THE DIALOGICAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

## SOCIAL THINKING DYNAMICS



**Antinomies** in common sense become **thêmata** in the course of certain social and historical events, e.g. political, economical, religious and so on, they turn into problems and become the focus of attention and a source of **tension** and **conflict**.

It is during such events that antinomies in thinking are transformed into **thêmata**: they enter into public discourse, become problematised and further thematised.

Then they start to **generate social representations** with respect to the phenomenon in question.

Markova (2003 p.184)

# Method

Social representations are not static “social cognitions” but are created and modified through **talk-in-interaction and discourse**.

-> **FOCUS-GROUPS** seem to be an adequate method for studying social representations, since it **relies upon verbal interactions and, to some extent, resembles conversations that can be observed outside laboratories**.

However, this method raises a lot of issues concerning the analysis of the data. In fact, a review of the existing scientific literature shows that, **if a method of analysis is used at all, more often than not it consists of a content analysis** (Grossen 2002).

Therefore, we need to develop methods of analysis which take the **conversational dynamics** into account and deal not only with content per se, but also with the **negotiation of meaning, the participants’ definition of the situation and task, their reciprocal positionings, their modes of alignments, the conversational resources, facework**, etc., since all these dimensions play an integral part in the construction of the meaning. (Grossen 2002).

Studies in  
Language and  
Communication  
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# Dialogue in Focus Groups

Exploring Socially  
Shared Knowledge

Ivana Marková, Per Linell  
Michèle Grossen and  
Anne Salazar-Orvig



equinox

How to analyse interaction and ideas expressed in focus groups? We should explore:

- language in real social interactions and sense-making, which are embedded in history and culture
- the ways people draw upon and transform social knowledge when they talk and think together in dialogue
- the ways people generate heterogeneous meanings in the group dynamics
- communicative activities and genres represented by different kinds of focus groups

# Wibeck, V. (2012). Social representations of climate change in Swedish lay focus groups: Local or distant, gradual or catastrophic?

**Focus groups** were chosen since they both offer a method for analyzing what participants bring to the group and constitute “**thinking societies in miniature**” (Jovchelovitch, 2001: 2) in which the process of **joint sense-making** may be studied in **action** (Wibeck et al., 2007).

Each focus group, however, was **internally homogeneous** in terms of age and education/occupation, since this is claimed to facilitate interaction (Jarrett, 1993).

A **semi-structured interview** guide was used in all groups, encompassing themes such as information sources, trust in actors and institutions, and responsibility for responding to challenges posed by, for example, climate change, lifestyle, and behaviour.

# Wibeck, V. (2012). Social representations of climate change in Swedish lay focus groups: Local or distant, gradual or catastrophic?

The focus group data were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed by means of “**dialogical content analysis**” (Marková et al., 2007: ch. 6). This type of analysis aims to capture the **dynamic and interactive character of the data**, rather than treating participants’ utterances as static, decontextualized artifacts.

**Questions** such as the following were taken into account in the analysis:

- What communicative resources are used in the argumentation, and how?
- What arguments are used, and on what explicit and implicit premises are they based?
- How do various types of arguments interact?
- What underlying values and implicit assumptions are used as shared but tacit resources in the argumentation?
- What values are shared? What values differ, and how?

# THE NARRATIVE APPROACH TO SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The Narrative approach to Social Representations is developed by Janos Laszlo (Laszlo 2003, 2005, 2005, 2007, etc) and elaborated by Liu (1999, 2002, 2013), Sibley (2008, 2012), and others.

Laszlo urges that narrative concepts are not alien to social representation's intellectual tradition. Maurice Halwachs, a student of Durkheim, claimed that people create and share stories that render their world intelligible. Their community feeling or social identity derives from narratives. (Halwachs, 1925; 1968).

Historical narratives are forms of social representations of history in each society. They provide patterns for group-identification, therefore they are also indicative for group identity.

László (2008) has been most forceful in calling for a narrative turn in the study of historical representations, particularly through examining agency in historical textbooks or other writing via scientific textual analysis.



# Laszlo's research on Hungarian national identity

Large sample of secondary and high school **history books** used in Hungarian schools and six Hungarian **historical novels** from the perspective of inter-group relations.

**Automated content analytic devices** used to map

- the types of emotions attributed to in-group versus out-groups,
- the distribution of agency in positive and negative events, and
- the distribution of intentionality in these events.

# SR of national identity in historical novels (Laszlo et al., 2002; 2003)

## Analysis of Hungarian historical novels:

1. *The Stars of Eger*
2. *Sons of the Cold-hearted Man*
3. *Golden Age of Transylvania*

## Analysis of main characters and of their actions:

1. *Strength, knowledge, wisdom, moral excellence*
2. *Courage, honesty, helping and democratic leadership - naivety, passivity and obedience*

Method: Qualitative content analyses, supported by Atlas.ti, both at a word-level and at a higher concept-level to detect characters' traits & values and the outcome of their deeds

## Analysis of coping strategies:

3. *Resistance, compliance, confrontation with acting out, evasion, negotiated compliance*

Liu, J. H., Wilson, M. S., McClure, J., & Higgins, T. R. (1999). **Social identity and the perception of history: Cultural representations of Aotearoa/New Zealand.** *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29(8), 1021-1047.

Ordinal representations

Survey on **social identity** and another on **perceptions of history**.

1. The **social identity survey** contained questions about age, ethnicity, gender, place of origin, languages used, family affiliations, and university major as well as four-item scales assessing strength of social identification with ethnicity and nationality.
2. The **perception of history** survey had sections that asked participants to (1) list what they considered to be the ten most important events in New Zealand/Aotearoa history, (2) rate on 7-point Likert scales how likely they would be to include sections on New Zealand, Australia, Polynesia, and Great Britain in the time periods AD 1000-1500, 1700-1900, and 1900+ if they were to teach history in secondary school.

# Similar articles

Similar: Liu, J. H., Lawrence, B., Ward, C., & Abraham, S. (2002). **Social representations of history in Malaysia and Singapore: On the relationship between national and ethnic identity.** *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 5(1), 3-20.

Liu, J. H., & Atsumi, T. (2008). **Historical conflict and resolution between Japan and China: Developing and applying a narrative theory of history and identity.** In *Meaning in action* (pp. 327-344). Springer Japan.

# Future

Liu (2013) argues that social representation of history have been a vibrant area of research in recent years, but their study **has been restricted mainly to the methodology and epistemology of cross-cultural and social psychology.**

With the growing interest in narrative inquiry and social memory across the social sciences and humanities, Liu thinks that there is no reason why **more qualitative methods grounded in more social constructionist epistemologies could not make important and fresh new contributions to the area.**

”SRs are squarely situated between the individual, their groups, and society, and thus epistemologically and theoretically have much in common with what is valued in narrative inquiry. The empirical building blocks assembled by SRT are just that, building blocks rather than finished, discrete products, and I for one would welcome qualitative researchers making use of them as tools for refining their narrative inquiries”. (Liu 2013)

Thank you!