Narrative Social Psychology and the Narrative Categorical Content Analysis (NarrCat) in the Study of Social Representations of History

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Social representations theory has long been interested in narratives (e.g., Bauer, 1996; Flick, 1995; Jovchelovich, 2002; László, 1997). One of the reasons for this interest is that narratives by their communicative nature resist individualistic and universalistic approaches. Stories are rather social and cultural phenomena: particular ways of constructing webs of meanings or psychological realities (Bruner, 1986). Another long term interest of SR theory is relating the social identity of people to social representations of their world (e.g., Breakwell, 1993; Duveen, 2001). We will argue in the present paper that a) social representations of history or collective memory are narratively constructed (László, Ehmann & Imre, 2002; Wertsch, 2002); b) narrative representations of history are intimately related to group identity (c.f. László, 2003; Liu & László, 2007) and, c) particular ways of narrative construction of history refer to psychological aspects of group identity (László, 2008). We will also demonstrate how social representations of history and group identity (e.g., national identity) can be studied quantitatively, through

computerized content analysis of historical narratives and how this enables empirically founded theoretical generalizations.

Recently, we have developed a new direction of narrative psychology, which draws on the scientific traditions of psychological study, but adds to the existing theories by pursuing the empirical study of psychological meaning construction (László, 2008, 2011). Scientific narrative psychology takes seriously the interrelations between language and human psychological processes, more precisely between narrative and identity. This is what discriminates it from earlier psychometric studies, which established correlations between language use and psychological states (Pennebaker & King, 1999; Pennebaker, Mehl & Niederhoffer, 2003; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). It assumes that studying narratives as vehicles of complex psychological contents leads to empirically based knowledge about human social adaptation. Individuals in their life stories, just like groups in their group histories, compose their significant life episodes. In this composition, which is meaning construction in itself, they express the ways in which they organize their relations to the social world, or construct their identity. Organizational characteristics and experiential qualities of these stories tell about the potential behavioral adaptation and the coping capacities of the storytellers.

Another remarkable novelty comes from the recognition of correspondences between narrative organization and psychological organization, namely from the fact that narrative features of self-narratives, e.g. the characters' functions, the temporal characteristics of the story, or the speakers' perspectives will provide information about the features and conditions of self-representations. In this sense, scientific narrative psychology exploits achievements of narratology (e.g., Barthes, 1977; Culler, 2001; Eco, 1994; Genette, 1980). However, whereas narratology studies effects of narrative composition on readers' understanding and experience, scientific narrative psychology is directed to how narrative composition reflects inner states of the narrator. Narratology has described a finite number of constituents and a finite number of variants of these constituents concerning the composition of narratives. Each constituent, or narrative category can reliably be identified at the level of the text. At the same time meanings at the level of experience can be associated with the constituents of narrative thus defined. *Narrative contains a finite number of structural or compositional 'slots' that can be filled with an equally finite number of psychologically meaningful contents, while the surface text may show infinite*

variety. This provides ground for developing linguistic algorithms which map psychologically meaningful narrative categories with respect to identity states and identity qualities.

NARRATIVE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Narrative social psychology as an empirical enterprise, i.e. as a branch of scientific narrative psychology explores group-identity relevant features in narrative language. Whereas mainstream social psychology investigates language as a mediator of group perception (c.f. the linguistic intergroup bias described by Maass, Salvi, Arcuri & Semin, 1989), narrative social psychology relates language to identity functions such as stability, integrity, continuity, positive value, autonomy, control, and so forth. It considers narrative composition in the sense of how emotionality, cognition, evaluation and agency are distributed in intergroup relations, and draws inferences to identity states of strength or vulnerability, emotional regulation, defense mechanisms etc. of particular ethnic or national identities. Thus, it measures narrative composition of intergroup psychological phenomena and interprets them with reference to group identity.

Identity-Relevant Social Psychological Composition in Group Narratives

In this section we introduce four premises to study social representations of history, their narrative composition and relation to group identity.

Intergroup agency. Agency seems to be a major category in narrative construction. At the same time, it is one of the basic dimensions underlying judgments of self, persons and groups. It refers to task functioning and goal achievement, and involves qualities like 'efficient', 'competent', 'active', 'persistent', and 'energetic' (Wojciszke & Abele, 2008).

Not only individuals but also groups are seen as agents as they are capable of performing goal-directed behaviour and also have an effect on their environment. 'influence others'; 'achieve its goals', 'act collectively' and 'make things happen (produce outcomes)'.

At least in Western cultures, agency is an important component of personal and social identity. Distribution of agency between in-group and out-group appears to be a sensitive

indicator for group identity. High level of agency in negative events reflects accepting responsibility for past failures, whereas assigning agency in these events only to outgroups indicates defensive identity with low control and low level of elaboration of historical traumas. If ingroup agency is prevalent in both positive and negative events it indicates a stable, well-organized and autonomous identity and a progress in trauma elaboration. On the contrary, high level ingroup agency in positive, victorious events and low level outgroup agency in the same events accompanied with low level of ingroup agency in negative events suggests inflated but instable identity.

Intergroup evaluation. Intergroup evaluation is an essential linguistic tool for narrative identity construction that organizes the narrated historical events and its characters into a meaningful and coherent representation. Intergroup evaluations are explicit social judgments that evaluate the groups concerned in the event or their representatives. These evaluations can be (1) positive and negative attributions assigned to them or to their actions (e.g., *wise, unjust*), (2) emotional reactions and relations to them (e.g., *admire, scorn*), (3) evaluative interpretations referring to their actions (instead of or beside factual description, e.g., *excel, exploit*), and (4) acts of rewarding and punishment or acknowledgement and criticism (e.g., *cheer, protest*).

Intergroup evaluation plays an essential role in the maintenance of positive social identity (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, in an intergroup context, interpersonal and intergroup evaluation shows bias both on the behavioral and on the linguistic level whose motivational basis is the demand for a positive social identity. The evaluation bias intensifies in intergroup conflicts: ingroup value increases, outgroup value decreases. If this bias in the accounts of past conflicts is still persistent in contemporary historical narratives, it suggests that the group still experiences historical conflicts as identity threats and strengthens its positive identity and cohesion by enhancing its historical greatness.

Collective emotions. There is a tradition in social psychology of emotions looking back to early cultural anthropology (Mead, 1937; Benedict, 1946), which claims that certain emotions and emotional patterns are characteristic of certain cultures. This tradition has been further developed in contemporary cultural psychology (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra & Park, 1997; Rozin, Lowery, Imada & Haidt, 1999). Not culturally, but socially conditioned relatively stable emotional orientations are currently also assumed (Bar-Tal,

2001; Bar-Tal, Halperin & de Rivera, 2007). Being a member of and identified with a group, people think and feel in accord with the group's characteristic emotional orientation. One of the emotional orientations which has been researched in more detail is the collective victimhood orientation (Bar-Tal et al., 2009), which means that the group turns to intergroup situations with emotions of an innocent victim.

Emotions that the ingroup experiences as well as emotions assigned to outgroups in narratives about the group's past reflect the emotional orientation characteristic to the group by being an un-detachable part of the identity of the group. In turn, these emotions derive from the representations of the past. Master narratives of nations which clearly have emotional entailments are called narrative templates by Wertsch (2002), or charters by Liu and Hilton (2005) following Malinowski (1926). We prefer to call them historical trajectories (László, 2011; Fülöp, Csertő, Ilg, Szabó, Slugoski & László, 2012), because emotions can be related best to the different sequential patterns of the nation's victories and failures as they became preserved in its collective memory.

Functionality of emotional orientations has also been studied. Whereas adopting a collective victim role in the nation's identity may seriously hinder intergroup communication and conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009), the optimistic American narrative (Bellah, 1967) is oriented to redemption (McAdams, 2006).

Cognitive states and perspectives. The occurrence of cognitive states assigned to ingroup and outgroup can best be interpreted from the angle of national identity when elaboration of past traumas is studied. According to this interpretation, the more cognitive states and processes (thinking, reasoning, etc.) appear in both ingroup and outgroup, the further the trauma elaboration has progressed (Pennebaker, 1993; Paez et al., 1997; see also Vincze, Ilg & Pólya, 2012). In this sense, frequency of cognitive states in historical narratives on ethnic or national traumas indicates the process of trauma elaboration toward a coherent, emotionally stable group identity. There are, however, other possibilities of the interpretation of the presence of cognitive states in historical narratives. For instance, Vincze and Rein (2011) have shown that the propositional content of cognitive states may overwrite the trauma elaboration interpretation (e.g., "The entente decided to punish Hungary"). In these cases negative propositional contents of the perpetrator outgroups' cognitive states serves assigning deliberation and thereby even more responsibility to outgroups

for bad deeds. These maneuvers probably do not promote the reconciliation with the traumatic loss, rather add to maintaining the emotionally disturbing experience.

Another aspect of cognitive (and emotional) states in narrative is psychological perspective taking. This function is also related to identity states in as much as it allows for entering the outgroup's perspective in historical narrative. It is obvious that people having a stable, emotionally balanced, future oriented ethno-national identity can afford to appear the perspective of former enemies in their historical accounts.

Historical narratives always have at least three perspectives. There is the ingroup (internal) perspective represented by ingroup members taking part in the events, the outgroup (external) perspective, represented by outgroup members, and the perspective of the narrator, who is usually, but not necessarily, a member of the ingroup and sees the events from a physical and temporal distance. The narrator's perspective prevails in most historical accounts, and this fact strengthens the categorical empathy of the group members who are exposed to these narratives in as much as the group is affected in the story. Given that cognitive process attributed to outgroups as a whole or individual outgroup members introduce an outgroup perspective, which in turn may set into motion a different form of empathy, that is situational, i.e. leads to a more balanced representation of the events (Hogan, 2003). Propositional content of the cognitive processes and outcome valence of the event, i.e. whether it was good or bad for the ingroup or the outgroup cannot be neglected in this analysis either. Enhanced situational empathy as a consequence of perspectivisation through cognitive processes and a better understanding of the historical event which may contribute to improving intergroup relations through abolishing stereotypes (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Vincze, Ilg & Pólya, 2012) will only occur if outgroup enemies are endowed with cognitive (and emotional) processes which go beyond the hostility and the unanimously negative consequences for the ingroup in their propositional content. Such an analysis of cognitive processes and perspectivization from the angle of group identity, which also considers relations to different outgroups in a wider historical span, i.e. numbers and types of outgroups who are endowed with own perspective in a historical period, provides information on group identity with respect to its stability, plasticity and future orientation. In the next section we will explain how these four social psychological premises are taken into account in the content analytic device we have developed.

NARRATIVE CATEGORICAL CONTENT ANALYSIS (NarrCat)

The computerized content analytic methodology we have developed rests on the psychologically relevant features of narrative composition or narrative categories. It is not the psychological correlates of words, word types (e.g. function words versus content words) or grammatical features (e.g. past tense) that interest us. Instead, following the principles of narrative composition, we are interested in the spatio-temporal perspective structure, the internal versus external perspective, the self-other and ingroup-outgroup emotion structure, evaluation structures, distribution of cognitive processes between characters and groups, etc. The program package NarrCat we have developed consists of hierarchically ordered modules for narrative categories and relational modules (see Figure 1).
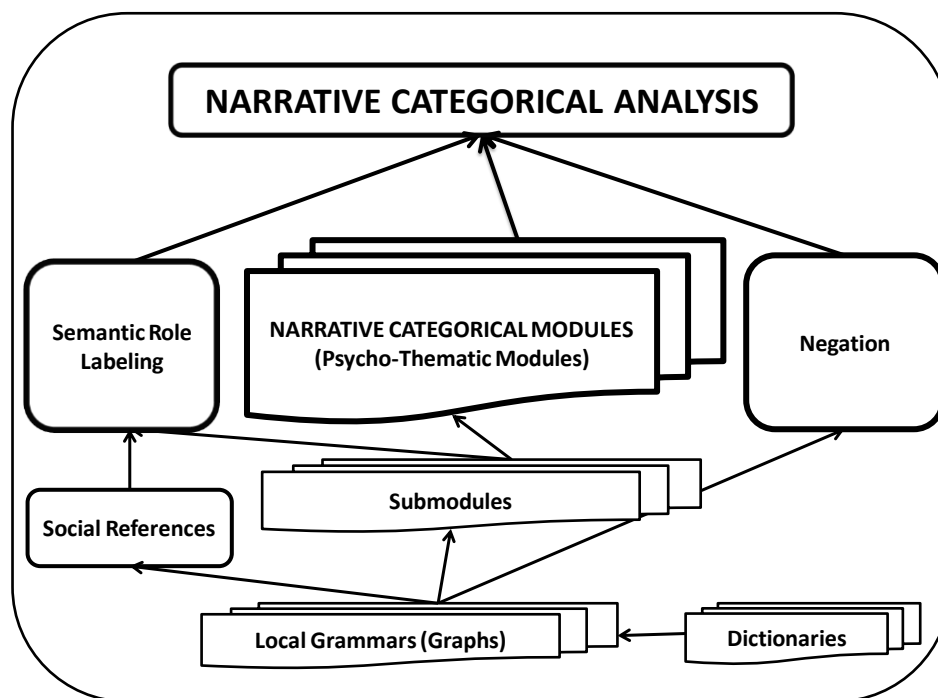

Figure 1. The overall structure of NarrCat

NarrCat allows social psychologists to "convert" the content of narratives into psychologically relevant, statistically processable *narrative categories*. For narrative psychology, the sentence *"I love Peter"*, for example, is translated into a meaning *"Self as Agent's Positive*

Emotion toward Other as Recipient". Or: *"In 1241, the Mongol troops attacked Hungary"* is translated as *"Outgroup as Agent's negative activity toward Ingroup as Recipient in the past"*.

The structure of NarrCat follows bottom-up logic. Similar to other computerized content analytic devices, e.g. LIWC (Pennebaker et al, 2001), RID (Martindale, 1975), General Inquirer (Stone et al., 1966), NarrCat also has dictionaries. Dictionary words and idioms are identified by Local Grammars and Graphs (both terms come from corpus linguistic terminology). These structural components perform several technical tasks, not detailed here – such as disambiguation of meaning, e.g. through anaphora and coreference resolution.

At a higher level, dictionary words and idioms are arranged into Submodules. Submodules are building blocks of even higher level components, *Psycho-Thematic Modules* and *Relational Modules*. Forming the main body of the NarrCat, the Psycho-Thematic Modules include Agency, Evaluation, Emotion, Cognition, Spatiality and Temporality, all composed of their respective Submodules (for example, the Emotionality Psycho-Thematic Module consists of Submodules like Positive and Negative Emotions, Abstract and Concrete Emotions, and so on).

The Relational Modules include Social References, Semantic Role Labeling and Negation. The Social References Module categorizes first, second and third person categories (I, We, You, etc.) and ingroup and outgroup references (e.g., 'King Stephan' is ingroup; 'the French' is outgroup in Hungarian texts). The Semantic Role Labeling Modules classifies Self and Other, as well as Ingroup and Outgroup into Agents and Recipients. The Negation Module is a cuckoo-egg in the system: it detects cases when agency, emotions, evaluations, and so on, are mentioned in negative modality (e.g., 'I don't like Peter' is not a positive, but a negative emotion.)

Thus, the program is able to generate quantitative measures of who feels, acts, evaluates, thinks, etc. what toward whom. The outcome of the process is a clear picture of the psychological composition of interpersonal and inter-group relations which are relevant for identity construction.

APPLYING NARRATIVE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Two domains where benefits of narrative social psychology and NarrCat have already been exploited are characterization of collective victim identity and elaboration of historical (collective) traumas.

National identity has for a long time been in the forefront of social representation research (e.g., Augoustinos, 1993; Liu & László, 2007). Using NarrCat as an analytic device, we were able not only to characterize the social representation of the Hungarian national identity, but also to unpack underlying social psychological processes of the Hungarian identity construction. In various sorts of Hungarian historical narratives (school books, historical novels, media, folk stories) Hungarians as individuals or as groups are represented with less agency as compared to outgroups, particularly in negative events from the Hungarian perspective (László, Ferenczhalmy & Szalay, 2011). We also found a hyper evaluation of the ingroup, and a devaluation of the outgroups in the overwhelming majority of the significant events across the Hungarian history (Csertő & László, under review). By parsing mental processes as indicators of perspective taking, we had to notice that outgroup perspectives are represented if at all only when outgroups or their members show hostile, negative feelings or thoughts toward Hungarians (Vincze, Ilg & Pólya, 2012). A characteristic pattern of emotions attributed to Hungarian actors in historical texts such as fear, hope, enthusiasm, disappointment was also discovered (Fülöp, Csertő, Ilg, Slugoski, Szabó & László, 2012). Following Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori and Gundar, (2009), we subsumed these features of the narrative identity construction under the term collective victimhood.

Being a victim of repeated traumas, losses, repressions and failures threatens the positive identity of a group, because these are opposed to the essential beliefs that the group is competent, strong or capable of resolving conflicts more difficult to maintain. Moreover, they may threaten the integrity or survival of the community. At the same time, the sense of collective victimhood may have certain identity-serving functions as well. It provides explanation for threatening events, through sense-making it helps the group cope with stress induced by a conflict; it gives moral justification and a feeling of superiority; it prepares the society for future harms; it enhances ingroup solidarity; it motivates patriotism, and can potentially gain international

support. Therefore, communities are motivated to maintain this status. By providing a scheme for interpreting subsequent intergroup events, assuming the victim position may become permanent. These 'syndromes of victimhood' may become a very dominant part of the repertoire of collective reactions, being transmitted through generations in channels of social communication and societal institutions (e.g. educational system, public and political discourses, traditions, rites, cultural products). Narrative social psychology and NarrCat helped us to uncover the social psychological processes that underlay collective victim identity, and also to show how its transmission proceeds (László & Ehmann, 2012)

The second domain where we have used NarrCat is historical trauma elaboration. The process of group-level elaboration in history and collective memory has rarely been studied. Historical narratives as written accounts of past experiences are available sources of collective memory representations that make them valuable tool for identification while also enabling the empirical analysis of linguistic markers of trauma elaboration.

One of the most significant events in the twentieth-century Hungarian national history was the collective trauma of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. The treaty ending the First World War for Hungary approved the detachment of approximately 2/3 of the nation's territory with 3.3 million Hungarian inhabitants, assigning the territory to neighbouring countries. Although till the end of the Second World War there were temporary chances for the revision of the treaty, in 1947, it was ultimately affirmed that meant re-traumatization for the nation.

On longitudinal samples of daily newspaper articles and history school books, we have traced the Hungarian trauma elaboration process in 5 years intervals from 1920 to 2010. NarrCat was able to map emotions, extreme words, denials, and ingroup-outgroup evaluations in all the material written on the Trianon treaty. Results showed that the elaboration process was highly dependent on the political context. In the first twenty years a gradually fading emotional intensity could be observed with a decreasing number of denials and extreme evaluations. The revision of the Trianon treaty in 1938-40, the Second World War and the subsequent Paris Peace Treaty which reinforced the Trianon borders, can be conceived as a re-traumatisation. The forty year communist dictatorship banned any talk on the Trianon treaty, consequently the trauma elaboration was blocked. With the political system's change in 1990 the Trianon treaty could again be thematised. By 2000 the emotionality level of the newspaper articles and the ingroup-

outgroup evaluation pattern of the history school books had approximated that of the twenties-thirties of the past century. However, political orientation of the newspapers is a significant factor: right wing media seems to be more emotional and more ingroup biased than left wing media. This increase in the symptoms characteristic of the early stages of trauma elaboration suggests that the historical trauma of the Trianon treaty is still alive. Its contemporary vividness is probably due to the re-traumatisation, to the long silence around it, and to the sharp ideological division surrounding it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Social representations of history or collective memory involve narratives. This narrative discourse carries and expresses the social psychological processes of the construction of national identity. Long term characteristics of national identity can be traced through historical narratives, just as temporary changes. Intergroup agency, intergroup evaluations, intergroup perspective taking and collective emotions seem to be sensitive indicators of national identities. These psychological processes of identity construction are available for qualitative analysis, but with language technological tools such as NarrCat, this analysis can be made controlled, i.e. reliable and valid.

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