

## Social and Semantic Networks in Communication Research

Chairs: Wouter van Atteveldt, Christian Baden, Jana Diesner

### **Ethnic, religious and constitutional justifications of counter-terrorism: towards a comparative analysis of media representations in Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, Flanders, the UK and the US**

In this millennium thus far terrorist acts, among others the IS-decapitations and the attacks on the Twin Towers 2011/9/11, a Bali hotel 2002/10/12, the Madrid trains 2004/3/11, the underground in London 2005/7/7, a Swedish cartoonist and a synagogue in Copenhagen 2015/2/14 and on Charlie Hebdo and a Jewish store in Paris 2015/1/7 were highly prominent in political news. Terrorist acts give rise to counter-terrorism measures at various levels, for example intelligence measures (cf. Julian Assange, Edward Snowden), national security measures (e.g. airport protection) and wars and international interventions (Afghanistan, Iraq, Lybia, Syria). These terrorist acts have in common that they were justified by the terrorists themselves with religious and/or ethnic arguments. The outcry "Allahu akbar!" of the Charlie Hebdo terrorists is just one example. Mohammed Bouyeri, the murderer of the Dutch film producer, tv-producent and columnist Theo van Gogh (2004/11/2), attached with a dedicated knife a note to the body of Van Gogh in which he explained in the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful that murdering Van Gogh had to do with the domination of Dutch politics by the Jews.

The contribution to the ICA-preconference 2015 is part of a comparative research project in which the justification of counter measures against religiously or ethnically inspired terrorist acts of political movements in various nations are studied. Justifications of counter-measures can be studied on the basis of (1) theories of argumentation, (2) theories of cognitive consistency and (3) theories of semantic networks. The approach to unravel discourse at the level of statements (Sätze, protocol sentences) in order to analyze discourse at the level of narratives has strong Austrian roots in Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of different worlds and in his famous statement "Namen gleichen Punkten, Sätze Pfeilen, Sie haben Sinn", in Sigmund Freud's theory of defense mechanisms, and in Fritz Heider's balance theory. Charles Osgood and colleagues were the first to turn the basic ideas into a systematic method for content analysis (Osgood, Saporta, & Nunally, 1956). This method has been further developed (Kleinnijenhuis, de Ridder, & Rietberg, 1997), and is now known as *relational content analysis* (Popping, 2000), *semantic network analysis* (Krippendorff, 2004; van Atteveldt, 2008) or the *core sentence* approach (Dolezal, Ennsner-Jedenastik, Müller, & Winkler, 2014; Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008). The latter name highlights that the alternative is to code political claims in items holistically (Helbling & Tresch, 2011). Yesterday's semantic networks are highly predictive of today's cooperation and conflict (de Nooy & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013), and of the issue positions that parties take today (Kleinnijenhuis & de Nooy, 2013).

The contribution to the ICA preconference is twofold. First, prototypical justifications ('ideal types') of countermeasures against religiously or ethnically inspired terrorist will be operationalized as specific semantic networks with specific actors and issues and specific directed relationships between them. Examples of prototypical justifications of (countermeasures against) religiously/ethnic inspired terrorist acts that can be operationalized as semantic networks consisting of elementary directed positive or negative relationships between specific issues and actors:

- denial, avoidance. For example, keeping silence about the nature of the religious and ethnic justifications that the terrorists used ("do not give them a platform", "laïcité, separation of state and religion")
- blaming the messenger. For example, justification of countermeasures by blaming the religion and the ethnicity of the terrorists.
- changing the subject. For example, justify attacks on the terrorists by first reframing their religiously inspired terrorist acts as an attack on constitutional rights
- differentiation, narrowing. For example, splitting adherents of a religion in terrorists on the one hand and innocent/good adherents at the other; justification of countermeasures against terrorists, while pleading for appeasement/integration/non-discrimination/multicultural cooperation with innocent/true holders of their religion and ethnicity.
- integration, broadening. For example, justify terrorist acts because the targeted objects belong to condemned categories like the crusaders or the Zionists. Justify countermeasures because the terrorist attacks were an attack on democracy, entire Denmark, and all Danes (Danish prime minister Thorning-Schmidt, 2015/2/15). Justification of a war against a foreign nation because its rulers/inhabitants hide terrorists or terrorist weapons intended for mass destruction.

Next, it will be shown whether, and if so, how, the elementary positive or negative relationships between specific issues and actors that make up both these prototypical justifications and the more complex actual justifications can be retrieved from political speeches, press releases and news items by means of an automatic analysis that decomposes also the grammatical structure of sentences (van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, & Ruigrok, 2008). For this end we will use the Amsterdam Content Analysis Toolkit AMCAT (van Atteveldt, 2008) to analyze example articles from media in the US, UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Germany. AMCAT facilitates the definition of semantic rules on top of grammar parsers for English (Stanford Parser, demo <http://nlp.stanford.edu:8080/parser/>, cf. De Marneffe & Manning, 2008; Klein & Manning, 2003), Dutch (Alpino parser, demo <http://www.let.rug.nl/vannoord/bin/alpino>, cf. Bouma & van Noord, 2005) and German (ParZu parser, demo <http://kitt.ifi.uzh.ch/kitt/parzu/>, cf. Sennrich, Volk, & Schneider, 2013). The empirical research results of the paper and the broader research project will help to understand the dynamics of religious and ethnic inspired terrorism and counter-terrorism.

## Literature

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