SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND NORMATIVE REGULATIONS OF BULGARIAN STUDENTS OF THE EUROPEAN GENDER EQUALITY LAW

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In the two studies presented here, the role of the core and peripheral elements of the social representations are analysed as a function of both – a) the induction of implication of the self with the object vs. not implication and b) the framing of the message (to eliminate discrimination vs. implementing equality) in case of the European Gender Equality Law in Bulgaria. The first study, manipulating the context personal (you yourself) versus substitution (society in general), produced a differential acceptance of the law in general: higher acceptance in the personal condition and lower in the substitution one. The second study, adding the condition of framing – restorative vs. improvement – as well as a measure of approach/avoidance orientation (BIS/BAS, Carver et al., 1994), found that neither the framing nor the motivational orientation influence the acceptance of the general aspects of the law, but did it, however, in the specific aspects, testing the congruency theory. Finally, the pertinence and relevance of the Theory of Social Representations to explain the different logics that the metasystem induces in the cognitive operations are discussed.

Introduction

Social representations (SR) could be defined as collectively made images by the society "of a given social object with the purpose of facilitating the communication" (Moscovici, 1976, 261). Once the image of the social object has been made, it turns into a social reality. According to the Theory of Social Representations, the object and the subject are not perceived as functionally separated from each other. According to Moscovici (1984), in contrast to the epistemological static nature, the social knowledge is co-built by the man himself (I) and by the other (other man, group, society or culture). On the basis of this idea, he proposes his

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triadic/triple model of relation between Ego-Alter-Object as an essential part of his theory of social knowledge. The object finds its place in an active environment in which it is "what it is" because it has been partially seen by a specific man and by the group as a continuation of their behaviour (Moscovici, 1973).

Wagner (1994), analysing the topography of modern mind, differentiates 3 big research fields of the Theory of Social Representations: 1) popular, folk science, 2) imagination related to a specific culture (cultural imagination) and 3) social structures and events. This paper fits into the third scholar aspect.

According to Doise, representations are the organised beginnings of the symbolic relations between individuals and groups (Doise, 1993; 2001). Reaching a consensus in the society (e.g. with respect to the European Gender Equality Law) is not identified with the majority's opinion, but with the normative regulations that are a motive power to the symbolic relations. Both in the opinion of Doise and according to the school of Aix-en-Provence, the relation between the different logics is investigated, or, in the words of Flament (1999), the normative models of cognitive functioning: metasystem and cognitive system.

Moscovici (1976), trying to explain the different logics of the normative and everyday thinking, argues that two cognitive systems are included in the latter: "We see that two cognitive systems function: the one that deals with associations, inclusion, exclusion, abstraction, deductions, i.e. an *operative system*, and the other that controls, verifies and selects by means of logical rules or not. It is a question of a kind of a metasystem that processes the matter that the former system has produced." (p. 254).

The relation between the organised beginnings of the symbolic relations and the cognitive operation is undoubtedly not new in social psychology. Many results in scholarly literature would find their explanation in this concept. On the other hand, many surveys of the ethnic stereotypes and discrimination towards minority groups (e.g. Valencia et al., 2004; Guimelli & Deschamps, 2000; Ganeva, 2009; 2010) establish presence of differences in the assessment of groups, using two different contexts for the normative system: a *personal context* (the own answers that the person gives) and a *context of substitution* (the answers that the society as a whole would give). In the personal context, there is a *norm of tolerance* that masks and successfully conceals the more negative assessment that is present in the context of substitution (answers from the point of view of the society as a whole). One of the aims of this paper is to make just an analysis of the normative logics with respect to the personal context and the context of substitution (the society).

Once built, the social representation has a definite shape and structure (Abric, 1998). It includes in itself ideas, characteristics, properties and assessments of the object presented. The analyses made show that the elements listed play a different role in each social representation and take a different position in its structure (Abric, 1993, 1994; Vergés, Tyszka & Vergés, 1994). A sum of those elements is the *central nucleus* that is a main part of each social representation. Without the central nucleus it would cease to exist or would change its structure.

In this sense, it may be argued that the central nucleus of the representation is a main one for its structure (Abric, 1993), whereas the lateral elements of the periphery, on their turn, serve for adaptation of the representation to different