

THE SYDNEY SYMPOSIUM OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social Cognition and Communication



Edited by
JOSEPH P. FORGAS
ORSOLYA VINCZE,
AND JÁNOS LÁSZLÓ



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Social Cognition and Communication

Language is the essence of interpersonal behavior and social relationships, and it is social cognitive processes that determine how we produce and understand language. However, there has been surprisingly little interest in the past linking social cognition and communication. This book presents the latest cutting-edge research from a select group of leading international scholars investigating how language shapes our thinking and how social cognitive processes in turn influence language production and communication. The chapters represent diverse perspectives of investigating the links between language and communication, including evolutionary, linguistic, cognitive, and affective approaches as well as the empirical analysis of written and spoken narratives. New methodologies are presented including the latest techniques of text analysis to illuminate the psychology of individual language users and entire cultures and societies.

The chapters address such questions as how are cognitive and identity processes reflected in language? How do affective states influence language production? Are political correctness norms in language use effective? How do partners manage to accommodate to each other's communicative expectations? What is the role of language as a medium of interpersonal and intergroup influence? How are individual and cultural identities reflected in and shaped by narratives in literature, school texts, and the media?

This book is intended for students, researchers, professionals, and laypersons interested in the interplay between thinking and communication.

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1

Social Cognition and Communication *Background, Theories, and Research*

JOSEPH P. FORGAS, ORSOLYA VINCZE, AND
JÁNOS LÁSZLÓ

The close interdependence between social thinking and communication has long been recognized by writers and philosophers. Indeed, much of social philosophy from Plato to Kant consists of speculations about the interdependence between mental life and social life. Several classical social theorists such as Cooley, Mead, James, and Lewin have focused on this issue, investigating the close interdependence between symbolic mental processes and strategic communication and interaction. Despite repeated claims for the importance of studying language in social psychology (e.g., Forgas, 1983, 1985; Krauss & Fussell, 1996; Moscovici, 1972; Semin, 1996; Smith, 1983), social cognition and research on language have developed relatively independently of each other in empirical psychology (Bradac & Giles 2005; Semin & Fiedler, 1992). Yet language has always been an essential part of social psychology (Strack & Schwarz, 1992), and language lies at the heart of mainstream laboratory experiments as well. As in everyday life, participants in every experiment must also follow the cooperative principle in interpreting the experimenter's messages (Strack & Schwarz, 1992; Schwarz, Strack, Hilton, & Naderer, 1991).

The objective of this book is to explore the links between the fields of social cognition and communication, and present the latest research on how social

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thinking and communication interact (Part 1). We also discuss how narratives can be analyzed to reveal the mental life of individuals and groups (Part 2), and how thinking and communication interact in strategic dyadic encounters (Part 3). Finally, the social and political significance of linking communication and cognition is considered (Part 4). In this introductory chapter, we take a brief look at the evolutionary, social, and psychological background of this integrative enterprise.

AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE AND THE SOCIAL BRAIN HYPOTHESIS

Researchers in both social cognition and communication increasingly take seriously the idea that the brain, just like the body, is rich in evolved design (Buss, 1999; Cosmides, 1989). The long history of *Homo sapiens*, living in increasingly complex social groups, required cognitive adaptations for social living. Effective communication assumes the mental capacity for representing the mental states of others, as well as representing others' mental representations about ourselves. There is now strong evolutionary evidence that social thinking and communication indeed developed hand in hand over evolutionary time.

According to the *social brain* hypothesis, neocortical processing capacity and the ability to coordinate and communicate in increasingly complex social groups have developed hand in hand in our ancestral environment, with the demands of social communication driving brain development (Dunbar, 1998, 2007). The maximum number of meaningful social relationships we can manage appears to be limited by cortical processing capacity. Regression analyses for numerous primate groups indicate that for humans, the mean manageable group size could be around 150.

It is remarkable that the size of most primary human groups throughout history, such as feudal villages and Stone Age tribes, approximated this number. There were about 150 people in a Neolithic farming village; 150 was the splitting point of Hutterite settlements, 200 is about the upper limit of the number of academics in a subspecialization, and about 150 has been the basic military unit size ever since antiquity. It seems that the computational capacity of our neocortex can support group integration and communication with up to 150 others. Indeed, language itself may have emerged as a cheap and efficient means of maintaining and coordinating such basic-size social groups, allowing early humans to collaborate and coordinate their actions (Dunbar, 1998, 2007). It is communication and cooperation that are the foundations of the impressive evolutionary success of our species, and it is the parallel evolution of language and a computational organ, the human brain, that made cooperation and social cohesion possible.

The Contemporary Social Context of Communication

Although an evolutionary perspective highlights the intimate links between social cognition and communication, historical and cultural influences also play an important role in how people manage their communication strategies. Modern industrialized mass societies present their members with unprecedented

cognitive and communicational challenges. As our social lives become ever more complex and impersonal, and as our social interactions increasingly involve people we know hardly at all, the cognitive challenge of making our communication strategies effective becomes ever greater (Forgas, 1985). The evolution of *Homo sapiens* shaped our mental capacity to communicate well within small face-to-face social groups (Dunbar, 2007), yet we now face a profoundly different communication environment that is far removed from the ancestral world of primary groups (Buss, 1999; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997).

In stable, small-scale societies, relationships are highly regulated. One's place in society is largely determined by ascribed status and rigid norms, identity is socially shared and defined, and social interaction mainly occurs between people who intimately know each other. In contrast, in modern mass societies, most of the people we encounter are strangers. Our position in society is flexible and negotiable, personal anonymity is widespread, mobility is high, and identity must be constructed and negotiated (see Chapters 13, 14, and 15, this volume). This dramatic change in social life occurred very recently, since the 18th century, as a direct consequence of the philosophy of enlightenment, the emergence of individualism, and the economic and political demands of industrialization and the French Revolution. Emile Durkheim (1956), the father of modern sociology, described this realignment in social relations as a change from *mechanical solidarity* (a natural byproduct of daily interaction with intimately known others) to *organic solidarity* (based on the rule-bound cooperation of strangers (see also Toennies, 1887/1957). The challenge of communication in our modern world of strangers is further exacerbated by the rapid development of information technology, where brief verbal messages sent in cyberspace increasingly replace face-to-face interactions (Semin, 1996; see also Chapter 2, this volume).

These new modes of verbal interaction present cognitive challenges that are only beginning to be understood (Forgas & Tan, 2013; see also Part 3, this volume). It is the first time in human history that social communication—once a natural, automatic process—has become problematic, and thus, an object of concern, reflection, and study (Goffman, 1972). It is perhaps no coincidence that the emergence of psychology, and social psychology in particular, as a science of interpersonal behavior so clearly coincides with the advent of anonymous mass societies. Although much of everyday communication continues to be guided by deep-seated, embodied internal mechanisms, the role of high-level reflective and inferential cognitive processes in communication has become evermore important.

TRADITIONAL THEORIES LINKING SOCIAL COGNITION AND COMMUNICATION

A glance at the historical origins of social psychology reveals that many pioneers were well aware of the close interdependence between social cognition and communication. However, rather interestingly from a historical perspective, the links between thinking and communication received less empirical attention than they deserve.

Symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the uniquely human ability to distill symbolic representations from social experiences as the key mechanism that allows people to construct mental models that regulate interpersonal behavior and communication. Rooted in American pragmatism, the symbolic interactionist approach was developed by George Herbert Mead (1934) and his student Herbert Blumer. For Mead, social cognition and social behavior (such as communication) were not distinct, separate domains but intrinsically related. Mead argued that communication is guided by the symbolic mental representations and expectations formed by social actors based on their experience of past interpersonal episodes. Thus, cognitive models of how to communicate in any given situation are partly *given* and determined by prior experiences, and are partly the product of concurrent, constructive cognitive processes. Symbolic interactionism maintains that in order to understand communication and behavior, we have to analyze the meanings that people construct about their social world.

It is unfortunate that symbolic interactionism failed to stimulate much empirical work in social psychology, possibly due to the lack of suitable methodologies for studying individual symbolic representations at the time. The currently ascendant social cognitive paradigm has changed much of this, as it essentially addresses many of the same kinds of questions that were also of interest to Mead: How do mental and symbolic representations come to influence peoples' narratives and communicative behaviors? Recent social cognitive research has produced a range of ingenious techniques and empirical procedures that for the first time allow a rigorous empirical analysis of the links between mental processes and communication (Bless & Forgas, 2000; see also Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 7, this volume). And in turn, the empirical analysis of narratives contained in books, newspapers, and personal histories now allows us to investigate the underlying mental processes of individuals and groups (see Chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15, this volume).

Culture and the individual. Another important, yet often neglected historical approach that is highly relevant to contemporary theorizing about the links between social thinking and communication is associated with the name of Max Weber. Foremost among the classic sociologists, Weber was always interested in how social processes and individual cognitions interact. He assumed a close and direct link between how an individual thinks about and cognitively represents social situations, and their actual interpersonal behaviors and communications. For Weber, it was precisely these mental representations about the social world that provided the crucial link between understanding individual behaviors and the operation of large-scale sociocultural systems.

Perhaps the best example of Weber's cultural analysis is his theory linking the emergence of capitalism with the spread of the values and beliefs—and behaviors—associated with the protestant ethic. This work, linking the internal, mental and the external, social, and communicative realms, is profoundly social psychological in orientation. Its key emphasis is on individual social behaviors as

they are influenced by shared ideas and social norms (see Chapters 16, 17, and 19, this volume). These mental representations in turn create and are the foundation of interpersonal relations and the operation of large-scale and enduring social systems. Weber (1947) assumes that it is the communication of individual beliefs and motives—for example, the spreading acceptance of the protestant ethic—that is the fundamental influence that ultimately shapes large-scale social structures and cultures such as capitalism.

Weber was also among the first to emphasize that a clear understanding of social interaction and communication must involve the study of externally observable behavior, as well as the subjectively perceived thoughts and meanings by the actor. This approach seeks to unify the insights derived from the social cognitive approach, with a genuine concern with real-life behavior and communication and its role in larger social systems. Weber, although he was not a social psychologist in the modern sense of the term, nevertheless pioneered a variety of ingenious techniques to obtain reliable empirical data about social cognition and communication. The careful empirical analysis of written and spoken texts is fundamentally Weberian in its approach, as Chapters 2, 12, 13, and 14, illustrate in this volume.

The phenomenological tradition. In discussing the links between social cognition and communication, the important work of classic phenomenological theoreticians such as Fritz Heider and Kurt Lewin deserve special emphasis. For example, Heider (1958) was among the first to explore the kind of information gathering strategies and cognitive processes on which social actors must necessarily rely as they plan and execute their interpersonal and communicative strategies. Heider's phenomenological theorizing produced some of the most productive empirical paradigms, including work on such key issues as person perception, attribution processes, balance and dissonance theories, and research on attitude organization and attitude change (see Chapters 7 and 8, this volume). Kurt Lewin's (1943) field theory represents another phenomenological framework that allows researchers to conceptualize interpersonal behavior and communication in terms of the subtle influences that occur within the subjectively defined cognitive lifespaces of individuals. For Lewin, and other phenomenological theorists, what mattered was not the objectively defined and measurable social reality, but rather, the subjective situation as it was seen and interpreted by unique individuals (Forgas, 1982; see also Chapter 8, this volume). The Lewinian approach affirms the principle that the way people mentally represent and experience social interactions should be the focus of social psychological research, an approach that is nicely illustrated in this volume (for example, Chapters 6, 10, 11, and 17).

Mead, Weber, Heider, and Lewin represent just a few of the classic social science theorists for whom the internal cognitive processes and external social relations and communication of social actors were integrally related. The ideas and theories of Mead and Weber produced an exciting new approach in the 1960s, the microsociological tradition. These dramaturgical analyses linking cognition and communication by Erving Goffman (1972) and others owe

much to Mead's and Weber's theories and, in turn, had a definite impact on social psychologists. Microsociologists produced some illuminating papers documenting the delicate interaction between mental representations and communication strategies in real-life situations. Goffman (1972) used the metaphor of the theater to study interpersonal behavior, and his dramaturgical account of communication, self-presentation, and facework continues as a unique tradition in the discipline. The development of narrative psychology—the empirical study of the psychological meaning revealed by written and spoken texts—partly grew out of this symbolic interactionist and phenomenological tradition, as the chapters contained in Part 3 of this book show.

Language and culture: Personal address forms. One of early attempts to link social cognition, communication, and culture is reported in the classic textbook of social psychology by Brown (1965), analyzing the interdependence between linguistic forms, and the cognitive and social variables that regulate their use. This work provides an excellent example of how the study of language can provide deep insights into the psychology of communicators. In many European languages (such as French, German, Hungarian—but no longer in English), personal address forms can be either polite and formal (e.g., *Vous*, *Sie*, *On*), or they can be direct, intimate, and informal (*tu*, *du*, *te*). Brown and Gilman (1960) showed that prior to the French Revolution, the use of these address forms was unambiguously regulated by a *status norm*: High status individuals were addressed using the polite form, and low status persons were addressed using the informal form.

With the philosophy of the enlightenment, the ideology of equality, and the social upheavals following the French Revolution came an explicit desire to remove the linguistic codification of status differences embodied in address forms. Indeed during the French Revolution, explicit attempts were made to reform language use to abolish the injustices associated with the ancient regime—in some ways, these moves were the historical antecedents of contemporary attempts to impose politically correct language use (see Chapter 19, this volume). The old status norm in address forms was supplanted by a new *intimacy norm*, requiring that familiar others are addressed informally, but unknown others are addressed formally. These two communication norms continue to coexist, sometimes in conflict with each other, even today (Brown, 1965). In Germany, for example, university professors are typically addressed as “*Sie*,” and students are more likely to address each other as “*du*.” However, when after years of contact intimacy develops, even professors may progress to addressing each other as “*du*,” an important social transition often marked by a small ceremony and drinking a toast together.

Brown's (1965) work illustrates that the analysis of how language is used in everyday life can provide rich information about psychology and cognitions of communicators, and the culture and history of the groups they belong to. It is unfortunate that this kind of research remains rare in scientific social psychology. However, the empirical analysis of written and spoken narratives represents

an important emerging field that continues the line of work that Brown (1965) began, looking at language as a repository of psychological and social meanings and influences, as the next section proposes.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF NARRATIVES

It is social cognition that underlies the production of all communication, and linguistic narratives in turn play an important role in defining reality and the construction of social identity. Narratives offer an important window into the mental life of individuals and communities, and their analysis gives us crucial insights into the cognitive and affective mechanisms that produced them (see Chapters 2, 12, 13, 14, and 15, this volume). The primary function of language and communication is to describe events, and the manner and characteristics of *how* narratives are constructed reveal deeply meaningful information about the communicators and their culture. Narratives may be defined as reconstructions of events, which involve some temporal and/or causal coherence. This minimal definition may be extended by additional criteria that require some goal-directed action of living or personified actors taking place over time. A full-blown narrative typically involves an initial steady state, some disturbance of this state, efforts for reestablishing the normal state, a new and often transformed state, and an evaluation in conclusion, which draws the moral of the story.

Narrative Thinking

Narratives whether oral, written, or pictorial reflect *narrative thinking* that is a natural, universal, and innate capacity of the human mind. Evolutionary ideas about narrative thinking stress its capacity to encode deviations from the ordinary and its mimetic force (Donald, 1991). Ricouer (1991) even derives mankind's concept of time from our narrative capacity. Recently, brain mechanisms of narrative thinking have been identified using Functional Magnetic Resonance Imagery (fMRI) procedures. However, narrative forms, just as time concepts or languages, also show a wide cultural variety, allowing the development of different sociocultural theories of narratives, reflecting the cultural evolution of narrative forms (Turner, 1981). Accordingly, these *narrative genres* reflect the characteristic intentions, goals, and values of a group sharing a culture.

Narrative thinking differs from paradigmatic or logico-scientific thinking (Bruner, 1986). In the paradigmatic or logical-scientific mode, we work with abstract concepts, we construe truth by means of empirical evidence and methods of formal logic, and we seek causal relations that lead to universal truth conditions. In the narrative mode, we investigate human or human-like intentions and acts using anecdotal methods, and explore the stories and consequences related to them. What justifies this mode of thinking is life-likeness rather than truth, as narratives create realistic representations of life. Narratives

do not depict events as they occur out there in the world but construe these events by narrative forms and categories to arrive at the meaning of the events.

Narrative theories are constructivist theories, and similar approaches have been adopted in a number of disciplines such as historiography (White, 1973, 1981). A true historical text recounts events in terms of their inherent interrelations in light of an existing legal and moral order, so it has all the properties of narrative. As a consequence, the reality of these events does not simply rest on the fact that they occurred. Rather it depends on how they are remembered and how they find a place in a chronologically ordered sequence: A “historical narrative endows reality with form and thereby makes it desirable, imposing upon its processes the formal coherency that only stories possess” (White, 1981, p. 19). Reality in a historical account relies on the use of rhetorical figures and explores dimensions of consciousness, that is, what historical figures might have known, thought, and felt. The historiographer as narrator takes up a narrative position; the origin of modern historical science itself is closely related to the need for national history that was demanded by 19th century nationalism.

Origins of Narrative Psychology

Interest in stories and everyday accounts of events as data for social psychologists originated in the 1970s as a direct consequence of the crisis in the discipline at the time (Gergen, 1973). The analysis of verbal accounts (Harre, 1981), social representations (Moscovici, 1981), and naïve psychology in general (Wegner & Vallacher, 1981) was advocated as a response to what was seen as the intrinsic shortcomings of manipulative experimental social psychology. Rather than obtaining data from subjects who are kept in the dark about manipulated experimental situations, why don't we just ask them for their own subjective explanation of the social world? Although using such subjective narratives as data is not without its problems, research on verbal accounts and narratives has now become a well-established field. The term *narrative psychology* was introduced in psychology by Theodor Sarbin's (1986) influential book claiming that human conduct can be best explained through stories, and this explanation should be done by qualitative studies. Events become socially meaningful through narratives, and story-like narratives permeate our understanding of everyday life with standard features such as “beginning,” “peak,” “nadir,” or “termination.”

Another important contribution, Jerome Bruner's (1986) *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* explored the “narrative kind of knowing” in a more empiricist manner. Around the same time, Dan McAdams (1985) developed a theoretical framework and a coding system for interpreting life narratives in the psychological tradition building on the Eriksonian framework that emphasizes the close relationship between life stories and personal identity. Whereas earlier psychological research looked at story production and comprehension from a

cognitivist perspective, narrative psychology also focuses on the dynamics of identity construction and functioning. The narrative approach became particularly influential in self and identity research, where the analysis of life stories offered a way of exploring the unity and coherence of the individual self (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Bruner, 1990; Freeman, 1993; Ricoeur, 1991; Spence, 1982).

Current Approaches to the Study of Narratives

In contrast with earlier qualitative and interpretive forms of narrative analysis (Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986), modern narrative psychology seeks to use quantitative methods to study communication and identity (László, 2008, 2011). Narrative psychology takes seriously the interrelations between language and human psychological and cognitive processes, especially the links between narrative and identity construction. The emphasis on identity is what distinguishes this approach from earlier psychometric work that analyzed correlations between language use and psychological states (Pennebaker & King, 1999; Pennebaker, Mehl, & Niederhoffer, 2003; Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010; see also Chapter 2, this volume). Individuals in their life stories, just like groups in their group histories, express the ways in which they organize their relations to the social world and construct their identity. Studying narratives can thus provide empirical data about human social cognition and adaptation (see Part 3 here).

Recent research on narratives also recognizes the correspondence between narrative organization and psychological organization. Features of self-narratives, for example, the characters' functions, the temporal characteristics of the story, or the speakers' perspectives, can provide information about the nature and conditions of cognitive self-representations. In this sense, scientific narrative psychology exploits the achievements of narratology (e.g., Barthes, 1977; Culler, 2001; Eco, 1994; Genette, 1980), but it is also directed at exploring how narrative composition expresses inner states of the narrator. Identifiable features of narrative construction reflect psychological processes of identity construction (see László, 2008, 2012; see also Chapter 12, this volume). This approach introduces the compositional level of analysis into the psychological study of language beyond the lexical and grammatical levels. To measure narrative categories and narrative composition, empirical methods such as the Narrative Categorical Content Analysis (NarrCat) technique have been developed, exploiting recent achievements of language technology. A unique feature of NarrCat is its capacity of Semantic Role Labeling (SRL). This function yields quantitative results about how an individual or group acts, evaluates, feels, and thinks about their social world. Thus, the output depicts the narrative (psychological) composition of interpersonal and intergroup relations that define constructions of identity. Several chapters in this volume illustrate the power of this approach (Chapters 12, 13, and 14, this volume).

LANGUAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

A key question when analyzing the interdependence of language and cognition is how various language choices can subtly communicate latent meanings to an audience (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6, this volume). Within communication research, there has long been a distinction between language and speech (cf. De Saussure, 1914/1960; Semin, 1996). According to one approach, it is possible to study and analyze the features of language as an objective system of representations. Alternatively, we may regard language as a medium of communication that can only be properly understood as *speech* when embedded within a real-life communicative context. The key question is the location of meaning (Krauss & Fussell, 1996). Within the first approach, meaning arises from the intrinsic semantic and grammatical properties of language. According to this view, language has distinct *inference-inviting characteristics* that are independent from the context (Semin & Fiedler, 1992). However, communication does not consist merely of the encoding and decoding of the message contained in a string of words, as assumed in earlier models of communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Rather, decoding the *literary* meaning of a statement is merely the first step in comprehending its full social *meaning* (see Chapters 8, 10, and 11, this volume).

The Cooperative Principle

Communicating and understanding meanings requires active cooperation, and pragmatic models of communication assume a cooperative principle embodied in conversational maxims (Grice, 1975, 1989). Conversation can only be meaningful when regulated by shared rules that both parties accept. In a sense, communication is an *inference game*, as understanding the meaning of an utterance requires inferences to be made by the conversational partners (Fiedler, 2007). The task is not simply to infer the linguistic meaning of a message; the speaker's linguistic choices or behaviors have further latent extra-communicational functions with important consequences (see Chapters 3, 6, and 18, this volume). However, communicators' adherence to Gricean maxims is not universal but depends on a variety of subtle psychological and contextual influences. For example, Chapter 5, this volume, shows that negative mood tends to reduce, and positive mood tends to increase communicators' tendency to violate conversational maxims.

The analysis of conversations proposed by Grice (1975) produced a new understanding of how fallacies and anomalies occur in survey research, rational decision making, and cognitive illusions, based on the pragmatics of cooperative communication between language participants (Schwarz, 1996). Growing interest in embodiment phenomena and in information sampling processes is also related to the role of subtle environmental and contextual influences on the way communication is constructed and interpreted (Fiedler, 1996; see also Part 1 here). In terms of Grice's (1979, 1989) cooperative principle, extracting meaning from an utterance implies the operation of a cognitive filtering mechanism before a proper interpretation can be constructed. However, some theorists (see

Chapter 6, this volume) maintain that there may be a direct mechanism (the direct perception model) for perceiving meaning.

Language and Implicit Causality

Subtle changes in language choices may implicitly produce large differences in inferences about causality. For example, interpersonal verbs may trigger assumptions about implicit causality that, depending on the verb class (action verbs versus state verbs), can convey different locations of causality for action. *Action* verbs (e.g., help, attack, or give) mark the subject as cause. In contrast, *state* verbs (such as admire, like, or respect) suggest the causal status of the object (Brown & Fish, 1983). The valence of the interpersonal verbs may also have causal implications. Actors of negative actions are more likely to be perceived as the cause of the event than are actors of positive actions (Franco & Arcuri, 1990).

The linguistic category model (Semin & Fiedler, 1988; see also Chapter 3, this volume) examines the influence of the concrete-abstract status of words on their attributional consequences. Depending on the abstractness of a word, people may interpret behavior as caused by situational or dispositional factors, as more abstract terms suggest enduring, dispositional causation. The tendency to use more or less abstract descriptions may in turn be influenced by such subtle and unconscious clues as a person's affective state—positive affect seems to increase, and negative affect decrease levels of linguistic abstraction (see Chapters 4 and 5, this volume). Interpersonal verbs can also provide implicit information about the time and duration of an event, the stability of the quality ascribed to the person, and the confirmability of the action (Rothbart & Park, 1986; Semin & Fiedler, 1988).

Counterfactuals

Another example of language conveying implicit meanings involves the use of conditional propositions representing alternatives to actual events, or counterfactuals (Roese & Olson, 1995; see also Chapters 3 and 16, this volume). Counterfactual communication often accompanies unexpected or undesired events, allowing communicators to mentally simulate alternative scenarios, using “If . . . then” or “If only” linguistic formulations. Counterfactuals can serve an affective function, assisting people to correct past mistakes (Roese & Olson, 1995). By means of counterfactuals, people may devalue the importance of undesirable outcomes, for example, by using downward counterfactuals (when the alternative outcome is even worse than the real one). In contrast, upward comparisons increase the perceived responsibility of the agent. Counterfactual communication has great propaganda potential allowing political actors to downplay the seriousness of negative outcomes by describing even worse counterfactual scenarios (see Chapter 16, this volume).

Language and Discrimination

Language also allows the subtle expression of preferences. The choice of words one adopts may have tangible consequences for human interactions (see Chapters 3, 6, and 18, this volume). Ever since the French Revolution, there have been political moves to regulate the use of certain terms in order to achieve socially desirable outcomes. These attempts are consistent with theories such as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity. As language is the medium of both communication and thought, if we can influence language use by regulating communication, surely thinking would eventually be changed as well? Alas, the historical evidence is equivocal: Even absolute dictatorships with complete control over all communication for generations (such as the Soviet Union, or the former Yugoslavia) failed to achieve lasting changes in thinking and attitudes. Although expressions of ethnic discrimination were completely taboo in these countries for several generations, the collapse of the dictatorship resulted in renewed ethnic hatred.

However, Maass, Suitner, and Merkel (Chapter 19, this volume) suggest that politically correct language use may have some beneficial consequences, as the very choice of words framing a message can convey ideological preferences (Goffman, 1986). Inevitably, when communicating, people make salient some aspects of a perceived reality and neglect others, which is reflected in their word choice. Language use also reveals the framing of how someone perceives reality. Political correctness principles provide guidelines for speakers to avoid the use of discriminative language. For instance, when a question is phrased in inclusive language (male/female form), people are more likely to think of women (Stahlberg, Sczesny, & Braun, 2001). Another political correctness principle is to avoid essentializing or labeling individuals with their characteristics and conditions (e.g., a “gay male” rather than “male”). Research stimulated by the linguistic category model also showed that using different word classes can influence causal attributions (see Chapter 3, this volume), highlighting the important cognitive consequences of linguistic choices.

Communication Accommodation

Communication of course involves a subtle and dynamic cooperation between communicators as they move toward defining and developing a mutually shared communication context (see Part 2, this volume). Communication accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Smith, 1979) suggests that interactants may choose to accommodate or not to accommodate to the communicational styles of their partners (see Chapter 9, this volume). Accommodations may serve various motives. *Cognitive functions* include communicative devices used by interlocutors to provide a meaningful organization of events most easily available for comprehension. On the other hand, the *identity maintenance function* of communication serves the reinforcement of the communicator's ego and includes protective strategies against information that

may have negative effects. In this respect, a communicative act may be convergent to facilitate comprehension and solidarity or to simply reduce interpersonal differences, but it also may take a divergent form when it serves dissociative objectives such as emphasizing status or intergroup differences (Bourhis & Giles, 1977).

Accommodative communication, the attempt of being in synchrony or congruent with the partner, is the normative way of interaction, and as such, it has many positive consequences: It enhances the speaker's attractiveness, perceived supportiveness (Berger & Bradac, 1982), or intelligibility (Triandis, 1960), and also increases the chance for future meetings. However, there are many situations when interlocutors' mutual orientation to reach a shared understanding is not successful. When communication adjustment turns out to be inappropriate, it may result in misunderstanding and may also have further social consequences such as perceived impoliteness. Even accommodative communication may be evaluated as less positive if it is perceived to serve authoritarian purposes (Bradac & Mulac, 1984; see also Chapter 9, this volume). Thus, perceived motives are critical when evaluating accommodative or non-accommodative communication.

Affect and Communication

Although affect has a crucial influence on interpersonal behavior (Forgas, 2001; Zajonc, 1980, 2000), it is only in recent years that affective influences on social communication have been explored. A growing number of experiments now document the influence of affective states on various cognitive mechanisms and resulting interpersonal behaviors. These effects occur because a person's affective state can influence both the *content*, and the *process* of thinking—and these cognitive changes in turn influence communication. Informational or content effects occur as a result of affect priming (Bower, 1981) or affect-as-information mechanisms (Schwarz & Clore, 1988; see also Chapter 4, this volume). Theories of processing effects emphasize the impact of mood states on the way people think and communicate (Clark & Isen, 1982; Fiedler & Forgas, 1988). People induced to feel good tend to process in a more constructive and assimilative “style”, in contrast, people in a negative affective state seem to adopt a more bottom-up and accommodative processing style (Bless & Fiedler, 2006).

These affectively induced processing differences have evolutionary roots according to Bless and Fiedler (2006) and show that both positive and negative moods function to recruit processing styles best suited to situational demands. Numerous experiments found that people in a happy mood tend to be more confident, optimistic communicators: People in a good mood are more cooperative negotiators, are more confident and less polite when formulating requests, and disclose more information about themselves (Forgas, 1998, 1999; Forgas & Eich, 2012). Negative mood in turn increases peoples' tendency to pay close attention to situational requirements, so those in a negative mood tend to be better at detecting deception, tend to be more effective

persuaders, and are less likely to succumb to judgmental biases when evaluating messages (Forgas, 2011a,b,c; Forgas & Koch, in press; see also Chapter 4, this volume). Positive and negative moods can also influence the speaker's communication style, resulting in greater adherence to Gricean conversational maxims when in a negative mood, and also more concrete and less abstract messages when experiencing negative affect (Beukeboom & Semin, 2005; see also Chapter 5, this volume). Thus, subtle changes in information processing strategies can result in major differences in how a person constructs and responds to communication.

THE PRESENT VOLUME

As we suggested, contemporary research on the links between social cognition and communication has produced a number of exciting new developments. Communication is only possible because humans possess a highly elaborate cognitive apparatus to perceive, interpret, and respond to others and manage their communication strategies accordingly. In turn, the analysis of communication outputs and language choices allows us to explore the underlying psychological mechanisms that produced these messages. In other words, communication outputs offer a reliable record reflecting the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of those who produced these messages. The chapters in this book were selected to represent a broad cross section of outstanding contemporary research linking social thinking and communication.

The book is organized into four main sections. Following this introductory chapter, Part 1 contains chapters that document the basic interdependence of communication and social cognition, showing that subtle changes in language use can produce major cognitive consequences, and cognition in turn fundamentally influences communicative. Part 2 explores the way cognitive strategies and epistemic assumptions can promote or hinder effective communication in dyadic social encounters. The chapters in Part 3 focus on the study of narratives as a means of discovering the psychological processes underlying communicators and the construction and maintenance of social identity by individuals and social groups. Finally, the chapters in Part 4 focus on the social power and cultural consequences of communication, and the role of cognitive processes in understanding these effects.

Part 1. The Interdependence of Social Cognition and Communication

Pennebaker and Chung (Chapter 2) propose that quantitative language analysis can provide a window into understanding both individual cognition and social and cultural processes. A computerized investigation of the various psychological, grammatical, and content categories in communication can yield intriguing data about the cognitive, affective, and social characteristics of the communicator. Given the explosive growth of verbal data as a result of the prevalence

of cyber communication, the quantitative analysis of verbal outputs offers new insights into individual psychology as well as social and cultural processes.

In Chapter 3, Fiedler and Mata suggest that simple verbal stimuli at the lexical level are ideally suited to exert social influence, as they carry substantial semantic and causal information while effectively concealing the pragmatic purpose of the persuader. Simple lexical stimuli are effective because they trigger implicit cognitive processes, produce priming effects, imply directionality and causality, may elicit in-group–out-group biases, and trigger autobiographical memory effects. Understanding the latent, implicit communicative power and social consequences of the judicious use of lexical categories can revolutionize persuasive communication.

In Chapter 4, Forgas reviews social cognitive theories predicting that affect has both an informative (content) and also a processing effect on cognition and communication. A number of experiments show that people in a positive mood are more confident communicators, use less polite requests, and are more likely to disclose intimate personal information. Other studies found that those in a negative mood process information in a more externally focused and vigilant fashion, are better at detecting deception, use more concrete and effective persuasive messages, and are less likely to succumb to various heuristic biases when interpreting verbal messages—confirming that affective states can reliably influence social cognition and communication.

Koch, Forgas, and Goldenberg (Chapter 5) show that people in a positive mood tend to adopt more assimilative, top-down processing strategies and tend to rely more on their pre-existing knowledge in social communication. Their experiments establish that those in a positive mood spontaneously adopt more abstract and less concrete words in their written and verbal descriptions of observed events. Further, positive moods reduced and negative moods increased communicators' adherence to Gricean conversational maxims—confirming that mood states have important, subconscious, adaptive roles in regulating communication strategies.

Pearson and Dovidio (Chapter 6) look at the influence of peripheral meta-cognitive experiences, such as processing fluency, on intergroup cognition and communication. Processing fluency tends to promote a sense of safety, liking, and familiarity, whereas disfluency triggers feelings of suspicion, distance, and dislike. Thus, experiences of disfluency tend to have particularly debilitating consequences in dyadic communication with out-group partners. This work helps to explain the role of cognitive mechanisms in the surprising persistence of communicative difficulties when interacting with members of out-groups and minorities.

In Chapter 7, Cooper and Trujillo explore the role of communication in the elicitation and resolution of cognitive dissonance. They suggest that the almost universal psychological preference for consistency exists at the interpersonal and intergroup levels as well. Communication is crucial to the process by which people infer the degree of consistency or dissonance in a given situation. In their studies, Cooper and Trujillo demonstrate that one way that communication-induced dissonance can be resolved is by individuals perceiving a counter-attitudinal communicator as atypical.

Part 2. Cognition and Communication in Dyadic Encounters

Kissine and Klein in Chapter 8 discuss the question of epistemic trust—in other words, how we come to believe and trust communications we receive from others. Whereas theories of conversational pragmatics imply that believing a communication requires a tortuous inferential process, Kissine and Klein suggest that believing a message occurs directly and without an inferential process. Their direct perception model, following research by Gilbert and others, suggest that comprehension and belief acceptance occur more or less automatically, and it is belief rejection that requires a secondary, effortful process. They suggest that epistemic trust—believing rather than disbelieving communications—also appears to be evolutionarily adaptive.

Giles and Gasiorek (Chapter 9) discuss communication accommodation theory, the question of how, when, and why communicators may prefer, or refuse to adjust their message and communication style in response to the expectations and characteristics of their partners. Communication accommodation does not always occur, and in this chapter, Giles and Gasiorek explore the cognitive and psychological processes involved in non-accommodation and in particular the question of how partners perceive intentionality and motivation in non-accommodative encounters.

Abele and Bruckmüller (Chapter 10) suggest that there are two fundamental dimensions of relating to others: *communion*, indicating warmth, likeability, and morality, and *agency*, featuring competence, ability, dominance, and assertiveness. These dimensions correspond to basic, universal human needs, are deeply rooted in evolution, and are anchored in language and social representations. Of the two dimensions, the first one, communion, is primary and is processed and communicated preferentially because it is this feature that reveals the warmth, benevolence, and trustworthiness of a partner. According to their double perspective model (DPM), audiences should be more focused on discerning *communal* characteristics, but actors tend to use and describe more *agentic* characteristics about themselves.

Peters and Kashima in Chapter 11 analyze the psychology of gossiping—perhaps the most common and ubiquitous kind of conversational exchange. Rather than considering gossiping as morally questionable and of no functional value, Peters and Kashima suggest that gossip fulfills an adaptive function in disseminating useful information about social actors and identifying and *outing* transgressors and freeloaders. Their empirical evidence confirms that gossip mostly influences moral evaluations rather than judgments of competence, and gossipers are evaluated more positively when they share morally relevant information.

Part 3. The Psychology of Narratives

László and Ehmann (Chapter 12) introduce narrative psychology and use narrative categorical content analysis documenting the way aspects of Hungarian national identity are represented in the language of school books and history

texts. They show that these texts reveal a highly vulnerable national identity, in which victimhood, the glorification of an illusory past, lack of cognitive elaboration, blaming outsiders for misfortunes, and an excessive sense of national pride go hand in hand. This analysis of narratives offers important insights into individual social cognitive processes, as well broad social and cultural trends in constructions of identity.

Vincze, Ilg, and Pólya (Chapter 13) explore the role of narrative perspective in the way individual and historical traumas are elaborated. For example, the differential use of temporal perspective (present versus past tense) is indicative of a speaker's ability to cope with traumatic experiences. Vincze et al. also show that the way linguistic devices are employed in school books, folk history, and in newspapers is informative about the way historical traumas are understood within a particular culture. Thus, narrative analysis reveals a great deal about how personal and historical traumas are experienced and resolved.

In Chapter 14, by Fülöp et al. explore the nature and dynamics of linguistic representations of emotional events in Hungarian history. In addition to narrative analysis, they also report experimental investigations showing that emotions characteristic of a collective victim identity dominate Hungarian narratives. They document a remarkable consistency of shared beliefs and emotions in collective memory about traumatic historical events, with collective victimhood a key feature of national identity, and feelings of fear, depression, and hostility expressed in history books, novels, and contemporary texts. This narrative tends to inhibit the cognitive and emotional elaboration of traumatic events, and the emergence of mature and adaptive sense of national identity.

Nencini in Chapter 15 reports analyses of literary texts as a means of discovering narrative representations of southern and northern Italian social identity. He documents distinct territorial differences in identity between north and south and shows that local identity was more salient in the past. In southern Italy, small group membership and regional identity is important for self-definition, but in northern Italy, more individualistic and self-oriented representations of identity are apparent. These narratives provide empirical evidence about the different ways individuals and groups think about themselves.

Part 4. The Political and Social Consequences of Communication and Cognition

Catellani and Bertolotti (Chapter 16) discuss how subtle linguistic strategies can influence citizens' political judgments and choices. For example, using counterfactuals (what could have been) can influence responsibility attributions, allowing speakers to attack or blame someone without incurring negative evaluation for themselves. It seems that these linguistic devices can bypass the epistemic vigilance of an audience (see Chapter 8, this volume) even in the face of countervailing partisan biases.

Crano and Alvaro (Chapter 17) suggest that persuasive messages from minorities play a crucial role in promoting progress, and even the advance

of Western civilization owes a great deal to the effective communication by cultural, scientific, and intellectual minorities. Their leniency contract model suggests that strong communicative messages from minorities may be effective if they are related to, but not identical to, the focal issue. Studies show that minority-based persuasion can result in an immediate change in nonfocal attitudes and sometimes delayed change in focal attitudes as well.

Beukeboom in Chapter 18 discusses the role of linguistic bias in maintaining stereotypic expectations. For example, people may use more abstract categories when describing positive in-group and negative out-group characteristics, they may explicitly *mark* individuals by using adjectives to note deviations from expected gender or racial stereotypes, and they may use nouns instead of adjectives to suggest that a characteristic is stable and unalterable. Thus, stereotypic expectancies can be revealed in a variety of subtle ways by the automatic and subconscious choice of words (see also Chapter 3, this volume).

Maass, Suitner, and Merkel (Chapter 19) explore the effectiveness of political correctness in language use. Language control has been part and parcel of social engineering and the propaganda armory of many regimes ever since the French Revolution to major dictatorships in the 20th century. Political correctness language norms remain controversial and Maass et al. explore if political correctness norms have any psychological and social impact. They present empirical evidence suggesting that political correctness language may have tangible and positive consequences for social cognition and, more generally, for social interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the relationship between mental life (social cognition) and interpersonal communication has long been one of the key issues for social philosophy, and more recently, for social psychology. For some decades now, the social cognitive paradigm has evolved without paying sufficient attention to the importance of studying language and communication. Yet, as the contributions to this volume show, language is always the product of subtle social cognitive processes, and in turn, language and narratives shape and influence our thinking and mental representations. As we suggested in this introductory chapter, there are important antecedents in social science theorizing linking communication and cognition, including the work of Mead, Weber, Lewin, Heider, Brown, and others. Several of the chapters here illustrate the close interdependence of communication and social thinking (see Part 1, this volume), as well as the importance of analyzing narratives for the psychological and social insights they can provide about the mental lives of individuals and groups (Part 3). We also suggested that language has a powerful social and political impact on the functioning of individuals and societies (Part 4), and in a sense, all interpersonal behavior involves the interaction of cognitive and communicative strategies (Part 2). As editors, we hope that readers find these contributions as exciting

and intriguing as we did, and we hope that collecting them in one volume stimulates a renewed interest in the intricate relationship between social cognition and communication.

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